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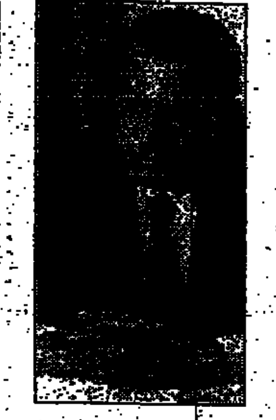
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A change of spirit: Interview with Pope Shenoudah III...p.2





Mubarak urges true democracy

President Hosni Mubarak yesterday urged Egyptians to go to the polls in the 29 November parliamentary elections, and to vote for the best candidate, reports **Nevine Khalil.**

"If we want true democracy, then all citizens should cast their votes," said Mubarak, who was inaugurating the first City Vision exhibition organised by the Ministry of New Development Communities. "We are not forcing people to elect certain candidates. They should choose the person they think is best. For the sake of our country's development, we should choose the best candidates so that we can have a parliament which truly represents the people."

Mubarak, in an apparent reference to the charge that some parties receive foreign funding, said: "I want to tell those who contact foreign agencies that there is no need for this. I am not saying that all the parties do it, but there are some party members who do. These contacts will not benefit Egypt, but we do not allow them to influence us either. All Egyptians are equal, but we have to protect citizens from those who violate the law."

On the subject of the call issued by Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan, president of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), for inter-Arab reconciliation and for lifting the sanctions on Iraq, Mubarak said, "All of us are in favour of Arab reconciliation". And, although Egypt could not interfere in Iraqi affairs, "we should search for a formula to alleviate the sufferings of the Iraqi people. I think that Sheikh Zayed agrees with me about this. We are making efforts in this connection and have achieved some success, but we need more time."

Asked by the *Weekly* about Egypt's nomination to fill the African seat on the UN Security Council, replacing Libya, Mubarak said that Egypt had agreed to fill the seat "in order to solve a problem, nothing more or less. We have no ambitions in this connection."

Mubarak also said that Egypt was working to solve the problem of the Palestinians stranded along the Egyptian-Libyan border. He asserted that Egyptians travelling to Libya face no problems, "but it is possible that those who go there to stay do face difficulties."

However, he told reporters, "We are in constant touch with Libya to solve these problems, and we hope that we will reach a solution."

INSIDE

Outcry over Jerusalem

Egypt and the Palestinians have criticised the decision by Congress to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem by May 1999. President Clinton, disagreeing with the timing, has promised a way out

Egypt yesterday described as unwarranted a Congressional bill directing that the US Embassy in Israel be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. It declared the legislation would have an adverse effect on the peace-making effort.

"The bill approved by the US Congress was unnecessary because of its impact on the general climate of the peace process," Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said.

The bill requiring the transfer to be effected by 31 May 1999 was approved 93-5 in the Senate and 374-37 in the House of Representatives. It was modified during Senate negotiations to allow President Bill Clinton to delay the move for a six month period after 31 May 1999 on the grounds that this is "necessary to protect the national security interests of the United States".

The 31 May 1999 date is at the end of a five-year transitional period laid out in the Declaration of Principles on Palestinian self-government agreed by Israel and the PLO.

A White House statement, indicating that Clinton will delay implementation rather than veto the legislation, quoted the President as saying the bill "could hinder the peace process. I will not let this happen and will use the legislation's waiver authority to avoid damage to the peace process."

Clinton would not have hesitated to veto the bill "under different circumstances," his statement said. But it noted that "given the virtually unanimous vote by which these bills were adopted, exercising that option in this case would not alter the outcome; it would only prolong a divisive debate and risk further damage to the peace process."

Alluding to the waiver, Moussa said: "The decision is not final and will not necessarily lead to the transfer of the embassy."

A few hours after passage of the bill, Robert Pelletreau, assistant secretary of state for Near East Affairs, said at a press briefing: "We know that Israel and the Palestinians made a decision in their Declaration of Principles to treat Jerusalem as one of the issues for permanent status talks and not to be taken up during the interim status, and that's precisely because of its sensitivity and volatility. And we do not believe it's appropriate for ourselves or others to be either going behind this agreement or trying to undercut this agreement."

The bill was pushed through Congress by a strong bipartisan coalition anxious to have it ready to present to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at a Capitol Hill ceremony yesterday commemorating the 3,000th anniversary of the arrival of King David in Jerusalem.

At the United Nations in New York, Rabin welcomed the bill, saying that Jerusalem was Israel's "eternal capital" and expressed hope that other countries would follow the lead of the US Congress. Only El Salvador and Costa Rica have embassies in Jerusalem now.

Arab-Americans reacted angrily. The American Committee on Jerusalem called for a demonstration on Capitol Hill yesterday afternoon. Khalil E Jahshan, the executive director of the National Association of Arab Americans, told **Thomas Gorguissian** in Washington, that this bill is "a direct challenge to the peace process and will erode the credibility of the US in the area." He added: "It is inappropriate and can only have a disruptive effect on future peace negotiations regarding the final status of Jerusalem and, ultimately, on the overall peace process".

Jashan, in a telephone interview later, told the *Weekly* that "Basically, the administration has agreed that they should oppose this legislation. They have described it as inappropriate. It is an intrusion on the power of the president and the administration to conduct foreign policy. This has been part of a tug-of-war over the constitutional battle in terms of who conducts foreign policy in this country."

Adnan Omran, the Arab League's assistant secretary-general, speaking to **Sherine Bahaa**, also warned about the wider repercussions of Congress's decision: "We hope that the US administration will realise that this legislation poses grave dangers not only to the peace process, but also to Arab-American relations."

Palestinians condemned the legislation, saying it showed a bias towards Israel that could harm peace efforts and foment violence.

"This decision will ignite the fire of hatred and resentment and will hurt American credibility as a co-sponsor of the peace process," said the *An-Nahar* newspaper, a pro-PLO daily in Jerusalem.

Sheikh Nafez Azzam, a leader of the Islamic Jihad group that has used violence to oppose the PLO-Israel peace process, said the US decision was part of a war against Arabs and Muslims. "With this step, America consolidates the state of hatred and enmity between it and the Arab and Muslim nations and confirms that we do not live in an era of peace and openness as they claim," Azzam, based in the Gaza Strip, told the Associated Press.

Mahmoud Abbas, otherwise known as Abu Mazen an architect of the Oslo I agreement, in a telephone interview from Ramallah with the *Weekly*, warned that the resolution will negatively affect the peace process. "Being a sponsor of the peace talks it is illogical for the US to undertake measures that side with one party, rather than the other, and which will affect the results of the negotiations."

Abbas acknowledged Clinton's efforts to prevent the Congress passing the resolution, but noted that the US president still had a chance to delay its implementation until the end of the peace process.

Contacted by phone at her home in Ramallah, Hanan Ashrawi, a former PLO negotiator, described the bill as "irresponsible, dangerous and manipulative. It is a cynical move because it is subjecting the peace process and other peoples' rights to domestic election politics."

Faisal Husseini, the top PLO official in Jerusalem, said the legislation violated past US assurances to the Palestinians and would prejudice talks on the final status of the city which are scheduled to begin in May 1996. He said the United States, "by changing its position now, can hurt deeply — if not stop completely — the peace process."



photo: Sherif Sonbol

COLOSSAL CLEAN UP: for more than a year the jets of water that spurt from beneath the celebrated pharaonic feet of the colossus of Ramses II, who stands in his namesake square, have been dry. Finally, Cairo's most celebrated statue is getting the attention it deserves. For too long obscured by fly-overs, Ramses is receiving not just a dust-down, but a Pharaonic face-lift.

Eyes open on Amman

Confident, cautious and unruffled by opposition, members of the joint government-business delegation prepare for the second regional economic summit in Amman, set to open next Sunday. Ghada Ragab looks at Egyptians' expectations and assesses their reservations

A 140-strong Egyptian delegation, including ministers, government officials, diplomats and business representatives is leaving for Amman this week to attend the second Middle East/North African Economic Summit, scheduled for 29-31 October.

The composition of the delegation is indicative of its mission. Putting the delegation's multi-tiered message across will require much political manoeuvering, continuous business give-and-take and a measure of diplomacy.

But regardless of whether they are going to Amman for business or politics, the members of the delegation echo the same war-cry: that full-fledged economic cooperation will be restricted until Israel reaches peace settlements with all countries in the region, and that Egypt must be at the heart of any regional economic plans.

The delegation is carrying a 300-page volume which details some 85 projects ranging from a regional railway to a textile complex in the Suez Canal zone. However, delegates warn against expectations that agreement on any of these projects will be finalised during the conference.

"We must not expect that we will be able to get offers and finance for all the projects we are presenting," Ambassador Raouf Saad, assistant foreign minister for regional cooperation, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a recent interview. "We must remember that Amman is both a political and an economic event."

The conference agenda lists a number of panel discussions dealing with regional trade, industry, infrastructure, investment, finance and the regional economic environment. But foremost on the agenda is establishing three regional institutions — a bank, a business council and a tourism association — which Egyptian delegates say will represent the backbone of regional cooperation.

Laying the foundations of regional economic development, in anticipation of a comprehensive peace, is seen by Egyptian *delegates as the main aim of the* conference.

However, on the eve of the conference, the establishment of these institutions remains saddled with differences among the various countries in the region. The Arab Gulf states claim the region does not need another bank; the Jordanian business sector, concerned about its interests in Syria and Iraq, is opposed to a joint business council with Israel and everyone is fighting over where these institutions will be based.

Egypt's presence and involvement in the decision-making process in Amman is seen as important even by critics such as prominent economist Ismail Sabri Abdallah, who, nevertheless, dismisses Amman as a "non-event".

He says the fact that no heads of state from the region — with the exception of the host, King Hussien — are attending, indicates that the delegations are not empowered to sign any binding agreements.

Abdallah, who heads the Third World Forum, argues that Israel is pressing for the establishment of regional institutions and projects as part of a long-term strategy to protect itself against competition from Asian goods in Arab markets after the multilateral free trade agreement (GATT) comes into full force. Through establishing a regional bloc, Israel will ensure preferential treatment for itself in regional markets, even after the implementation of GATT.

"Israel is interested in building structures of integration and is concentrating on projects of a regional nature in the fields of energy and water. It needs to prove that a linkage of interests exists," he said.

Despite Israel's efforts, Abdallah predicts that the planned announcement of the establishment of a regional bank during the conference will not materialise, because, he says, the Arab Gulf states remain suspicious of the bank's aims and the EU is not ready to repeat the unsuccessful experience of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, established to rebuild Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism.

Whether the conference will be a turning point in regional cooperation or a mere publicity stunt remains to be seen.

In the meantime, Egyptian opposition parties and professional syndicates, which have traditionally opposed normalisation, have been waging a fierce campaign against Egypt's participation in the conference.

Trade relations between Egypt and Israel have been stepped up since the Casablanca conference last year, seen by the business community as a green light for normalisation.

Some low-profile but large joint projects are already being established, such as a $1 billion oil refinery just outside Alexandria owned jointly by the Egyptian General Petroleum Organisation, Egyptian businessmen Hussein Salem, and the Israeli Merhav group.

However, a poll conducted by *Al-Ahram Weekly* and Almishkat Centre for Research and Training last December showed widespread popular disapproval of economic normalisation with Israel. About 70 per cent of 1,500 respondents polled at the Cairo and Giza railway stations said they refused to buy Israeli products and opposed the establishment of Israeli factories in Egypt.

Business relations, politics, and conferences aside, this psychological barrier remains evident 16 years after the peace treaty with Israel. Even those who have already bought a ticket to Amman have to reckon with this barrier.

Both officials and businessmen stress that one of the Egyptian delegation's main tasks will be to guard against any decisions or projects which could jeopardise Egypt's political and economic interests.

In the words of a business representative attending the conference:

"We are confident that we can establish Egypt as the core of any regional cooperation, but our eyes will remain wide open to ensure that they [the Israelis] *don't pull any tricks.*"

The coming parliamentary elections promise a higher Coptic profile. Pope Shenoudah III, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, has been urging Copts to greater political participation, but insists this should be on non-sectarian lines. **Dina Ezzat** speaks to the Pope and, examining Coptic chances in November's ballot, finds out they remain disproportionately small

A change of spirit

A small number of Copts are planning to run for election. Are you satisfied with this response to your call or were you hoping for greater participation?

The call was for Copts to register their names on the voters' lists, so they *could* cast their ballots in the election. This is the main form of political participation.

Copts have indeed shown a good response to that call, despite major obstacles put in their way by the administrative bodies and the vicious circle of bureaucracy. For example, when many people went to register, one difficulty they found was that although they lived in Cairo, the addresses on their identity cards were those of their home towns [election regulations require people to vote in the constituency covered by their identity card address]. But in any case, there has been an obvious increase in the number of Copts registering to vote.

As for Copts running for election, this has to be done either independently or through political parties, and it really depends on the political parties. Naturally, each party makes its own electoral calculations on the basis of which it decides — legitimately — whether to nominate Copts and where.

But during the registration period, some Copts have complained that the registry clerks put obstacles in their way. What did the Church do about this?

Well, this is the situation we have to deal with. On the one hand, the leadership is expressing good will and, on the other hand, we have the executive bodies making problems.

It happened quite often that a Coptic citizen would go and register his name but would not get his voting card on the same day. Of course, not everyone has the persistence to keep going back to the registry office two or even four times to collect the voting card. And when the person fails to collect his card, the office either does not deliver the card at all, or issues it to someone else.

Actually, some Copts are registered on the voters' lists but they don't know it. So, I have advised Copts to check whether they are registered or not, and to collect their voting cards if they are.

The number of Coptic candidates will be around two per cent of the total number of nominees, so their representation in parliament cannot possibly exceed that percentage. This is extremely disproportionate to the number of Coptic citizens. What should be done?

Let me say that many political situations need time and patience *until they start to change* gradually. Now, what really matters is to have some Copts getting into parliament through the ballot box and not by appointment. As Copts get more familiar with the election process, they will gradually gain more seats in parliament.

And Copts are not only interested in getting Copts into parliament. They also want to see some of their Muslim friends there, friends who are trusted to champion the Copts' needs and causes.

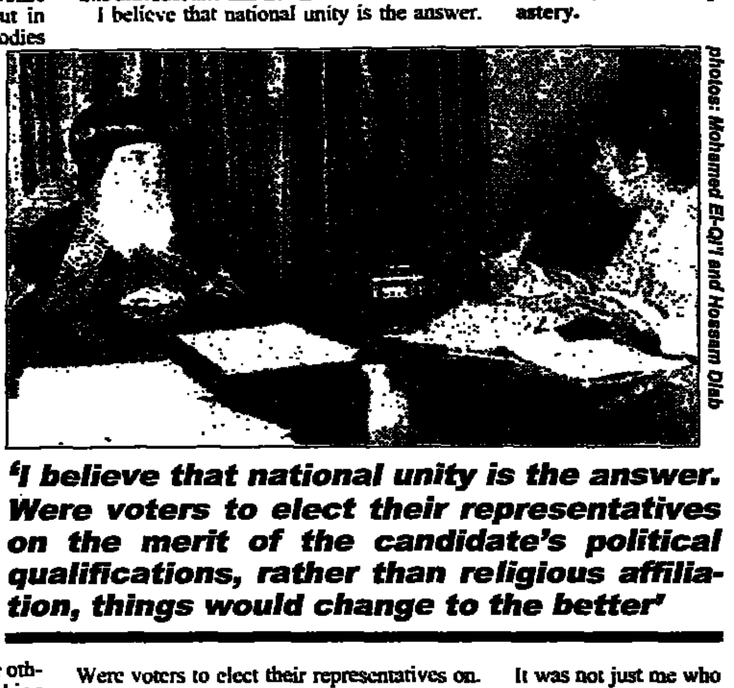
***And yet Copts have to put up with specific* problems such as restrictions on the restoration and construction of churches. Don't you agree that it would be better if a number of parliamentary seats were reserved for Copts so that they could voice their own concerns?**

We cannot approve of this system because it goes against the freedom of people to elect their representatives. Moreover, Copts who get elected are not in parliament just to represent Copts; they are there to serve the entire nation.

As for problems like the construction of churches, I think it would be better to have these matters raised by Muslims than by Copts.

When Copts run for election and hardly get any votes, what can they do? I think that what we need is a change in the spirit that causes this attitude, and this needs time.

I believe that national unity is the answer.



photos: Mohamed El-[illegible] and Hossam Diab

'I believe that national unity is the answer. Were voters to elect their representatives on the merit of the candidate's political qualifications, rather than religious affiliation, things would change to the better'

Were voters to elect their representatives on. National unity is much better.

Factionalism will drag us into many problems that we are better off without. Given that we are living in times where extremism is taking a serious toll, it would be unwise to make *an additional contribution to sectarianism.*

But reserving seats for Copts is not necessarily a call for sectarian strife. And the Copts' sense of frustration that their problems remain unsolved is not good either.

The state does not wish to start a situation that could evolve into the Lebanese style of political representation whereby parliamentary seats and cabinet portfolios are distributed among the different sects in certain proportions.

The lack of Coptic participation in politics over the last few decades has been attributed to a traditional Coptic passivity. What do you think?

This attitude is common to all Egyptians, Muslims and Copts alike. And this is shown by the results of previous elections. What does it mean when a winning candidate gets 2,000 votes in an electoral district of 10,000 or 20,000 voters? It means that Egyptians are *not voting. I really think that this lack of interest* in political participation should be considered in its full dimensions instead of repeating this assertion about the passivity of Copts over and over again.

And let me add that if Copts are being passive, it is because passivity is being imposed on them. When Copts run for election and hardly get any votes, what can they do? I think that what we need is a change in the spirit that causes this attitude, and this needs time.

I believe that national unity is the answer. *Were voters to elect their representatives on* the merit of the candidate's political qualifications, rather than religious affiliation, things would change to the better.

During the old days of Saad Zagloul, a Copt would run in a mainly Muslim district and win. The opposite was also true. But now Copts feel that their Muslim brothers will never vote for them, so they say why bother if we have no chance. And it is not just the parliamentary elections. The same thing happens in elections for municipal councils, professional syndicates and many other bodies.

Some Copts link this apathy to the late President Anwar El-Sadat's action against you, when, shortly before his assassination in 1981, he exiled you to a desert monastery.

It was not just me who had to undergo this experience. Other politicians, journalists, university professors and Muslim clergy went through the same ordeal. But those days belong to the past and what happened to me then has little impact on the way things are going now.

The attitude we are talking about did not start then. It had been there before September 1981; Copts were hardly ever winning elections.

The blame for Coptic apathy is sometimes placed at your door. Your critics claim that you deny other Copts the opportunity to speak up because you want to *remain the sole Coptic* spokesman.

Let me respond by a simple question: what power do I have to prevent anyone from becoming involved in politics? Anyone is free to nominate himself or join any political party. And I do not know of anyone who can claim that I stood in his way when he wanted to take up politics.

For years, I had to put up with these unfair accusations. But I have never stopped any Copt from speaking about Coptic affairs. *There have been so many problems, why* didn't they speak up? And those who have access to the press, where they attacked me personally, why didn't they speak up about the problems of Copts?

Every time I speak up, they ask why I involve myself in politics and why don't I leave it to the seculars. But if I do not speak, the seculars do not speak either. They ignore the problems and act as if they were living on another planet.

Yet, some critics claim you use your religious authority to keep those involved in politics under control. For example, they say that all the candidates in the coming elections came to you to ask for permission. Is this true?

No. Why should anybody seek permission for something which is their right. Those who came here wanted the papal blessing. They *simply wanted me to pray for them. I have al*ways encouraged Copts to take an active national role, but what can I do if the doors are closed in their faces?

Some believe that radical Islamist candidates have a chance of winning a fair number of *parliamentary* seats. How would that affect the Copts?

These speculations suggest that the extremist trend is popular. In any event, we wish everybody well. We are not battling against anyone. Throughout our history we have survived very harsh times. And we are still surviving. And God who saved us before will save us now. So, we fear nobody.

Copts re-join the electoral fray

As Islamists prepare to throw their full weight into the coming battle for parliament's 444 contested seats, Copts are expected to renounce the passive attitude they have maintained for years and participate more actively, both as voters and candidates. While the Copts' chances of equitable representation in the next People's Assembly seem slight, analysts nevertheless view their political comeback as a healthy sign.

For over a decade, Copts have demonstrated an increasing reluctance to involve themselves in domestic politics, an apparent reaction to the *Islamist* upsurge *which began under* the regime of President Anwar El-Sadat. But this passive attitude appears to be changing, both as a result of the Church's encouragement and the growing realisation among Copts that withdrawal from national politics marginalises them in a way that could only bolster the Islamist movement. Many appear set to cast their ballots in the 29 November *elections*; some are preparing to run as candidates.

Several political parties, led by the Wafd and including the National Democratic Party (NDP), the leftist Tagammu and even the *Islamist-oriented Labour* Party, *are fielding* a limited number of Copts in the election battle. The Wafd, known as the "house of the Copts", is launching 30 candidates, the largest for a single party. Labour has pledged support for two and the NDP is nominating a figure somewhere in between. The Tagammu has nominated one and there is a possibility that a second may be added.

"We are doing the right thing," said Mounir Abdel-Nour, the Wafd's candidate in Cairo's *Al-Wayli* constituency. "It *is a good* step towards the full political participation of Copts, as well as Muslims, which will serve as a solid basis for social stability."

Many Copts credit Pope Shenoudah III for their change in attitude. The head of the Coptic Orthodox Church has asserted repeatedly that it is the Copts' "right and duty" to play a more active role in politics, particularly in the parliamentary elections.

The political parties have different motives for nominating Copts. Labour, despite its Islamist orientation wants to show that it is nevertheless a party for all Egyptians. And Tagammu, whose newspaper, *Al-Ahali*, devoted unprecedented *attention to Coptic concerns* during the past year, appears eager to win over Coptic voters as it tries to present itself as the opposition's alternative to Islamism. As the ruling party, the NDP feels politically and morally bound to represent the entire nation; and the Wafd has traditionally targeted the Coptic vote.

Coptic candidates insist that despite their religious affiliations, they are contesting the elections as patriotic Egyptians. "When I address my constituents, I do not confine myself to Coptic concerns. I do not say that since I am a Copt, all Copts have to vote for me," said *Nabil Habib*, the Labour candidate in the *Giza first district*.

Analysts agree that the total number of Coptic candidates is unlikely to exceed the modest figure of 40, around two per cent of the total number of candidates, estimated at slightly over 2,000. Even if all the Coptic candidates won seats in the Assembly, which is unlikely, the Coptic representation would still be meagre indeed — Copts are estimated at between six and 10 per cent of the nation's 60 million population.

But it will be an achievement for any Copts to make it to the Assembly, argues Wagih Shukri, the Tagammu's candidate in Bandar Al-Minya constituency, pointing out *that all* five Coptic members of the outgoing parliament were not elected but appointed by the president of the Republic. In addition to the Assembly's 444 contested seats, the *president* has a constitutional right to appoint 10 MPs.

Launching Copts as election candidates should be "very carefully calculated", according to Rifaat El-Said, secretary-general of Tagammu. The principal criterion is to choose Copts who have a good chance to win, "not to nominate a Copt just for the sake of nominating a Copt". According to El-Said, nominating a Copt who will only win two or three votes in an electoral district of a few thousand people will prove frustrating to Coptic voters and candidates alike.

Some analysts date Coptic reluctance to get involved in politics as far back as 1953, when the multi-party system was abolished. But others *link it with the rise of the* Islamist trend *in the 1970s and 80s*, which reached a peak when Sadat banished Pope Shenoudah to a Western Desert monastery shortly before the president's assassination in October 1981.

Sermons by hardline Muslim sheikhs have encouraged anti-Coptic sentiment in some parts of the country. "So, gone are the days when a Coptic candidate would win the vast majority of votes in an all-Muslim constituency," said Marlyn Tadros, a human rights activist. Physical attacks against Copts, including killings, by the militant Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya in Upper Egypt, have discouraged Copts from participating in public activity, a Coptic clergyman in Al-Minya reported.

During the past three months, as preparations for the elections got underway, *Islamist* militants have harassed or killed a number of Copts in Upper Egypt. "I have received threats but decided to ignore them," Shukri said. "After all, those who have been killed were not even involved in politics. If they [militants] decide to kill me, they will anyway."

But overall, the climate is one of cautious optimism, according to Bishop Moussa, head of the Church's national participation group. In his opinion, what really counts is that Copts exercise the rights and duties of citizenship.

The Church has been urging Copts to register as voters since the end of last year. The campaign began with an article by Pope Shenoudah in the Church's magazine *Al-Kerazah*, urging a more active political attitude. Sermons on the same theme were subsequently delivered in churches and vote registration forms distributed to church-goers to spare them the trouble of picking them up from civil registry offices.

Press law out of court

The Constitutional Court has turned down a government request to provide a legal interpretation of a controversial law on publication offences

The Supreme Constitutional Court has turned down a government request to pronounce a legal opinion on whether or not some articles of Law 93 of 1995 are constitutional. The court, under Judge Awad El-Morr, also declined to provide a legal inter*pretation of the law which pro*vides harsh penalties for the publication of false or malicious news.

The court stated that its legal jurisdiction did not cover legal texts "whose application has re*mained* dormant... *The* texts must be enforced first and their application must reveal conflicting positions on the meaning of their content."

The court also said it could not rule on the constitutionality of a legal text unless it relates to a legal dispute being heard in the courts.

The court's decision, announced *last Saturday*, disappointed the majority of journalists. But next month's trial of Magdi Hussein, editor-in-chief of *Al-Shaab*, the Labour Party's mouthpiece, may provide his lawyers with the opportunity to contest the legality of Law 93 before the Constitutional Court. Hussein is the *first journalist against whom* the law has been invoked. He will stand trial before a misdemeanour's court on 15 November on libel charges brought against him by Ala'a El-Alfi, son of Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi.

*Law 93, pushed through par*liament at the end of May, has angered journalists because of its stiff penalties and ambiguous language. The law also gives prosecutors the right to take a journalist into custody while he is being investigated for a publication offence.

Reacting to the Constitutional Court's decision, Galal Aref, a columnist for *Al-Arabi*, mouthpiece of the Democratic Nasserist Party, said: "We knew from the start that this was going to happen. The government is simply procrastinating after it failed to meet journalists' legitimate *demand for the repeal of this* law."

Another journalist, who asked that his name be withheld, agreed. "I am sure that the government knew that this was going to happen," he said. "It just wanted to buy time and see if the journalists would bow before this law."

The Press Syndicate was not setting much store by the court's decision either, according to Galal Eissa, the syndicate's deputy chairman. "We were not counting much on what would come out of the Supreme Constitutional Court. We are waiting to *see what will* emerge from the committee that is drafting a new press law," he said.

At present, two separate committees, one formed by the government and the other by the Press Syndicate, are working on a new law to guarantee journalists' rights while providing a framework to penalise journalists who violate a "code of ethics".

The draft being prepared by the Press Syndicate will be passed on to the government-appointed committee. "The government committee will have to incorporate our draft into its project if it is really keen on accommodating the wishes of journalists," said Magdi Mehanna, a member of the syndicate's council.

Meanwhile, Magdi Hussein told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the case brought against him and its timing "are in the best interest of journalists. As I am standing trial next month, my lawyers will have the opportunity to contest the constitutionality of the law; then the Supreme Constitutional Court will have to make a pro*nouncement on it*."

The syndicate's council also said it will use the trial to put pressure on the government to have the law repealed. **DE**

Detained Brothers set to run

Sixteen detained Muslim Brotherhood figures are planning to run for election from behind bars, but they seem to be fighting a losing battle. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

The confrontation between the government and the Muslim Brotherhood took a fresh twist this week when sources from the outlawed organisation reported that 16 of their jailed colleagues had decided to contest the November elections from behind bars. But the sources concede that their chances are slim because they will automatically forfeit their right to run for election or to be a member of parliament if they have been sentenced by the military court where they are due to stand trial.

The 16 are part of a group of 79 Brotherhood figures — known as case 136 of 1995 — who were arrested on charges of belonging to an illegal organisation bent on overthrowing the government and providing support to underground terrorist groups. Forty-nine are standing trial at present and the remaining 30 are waiting their turn.

The news that the 16 have started the nomination process by filing the necessary papers with the prison authorities followed a Brotherhood announcement that 149 of its members will be running as independent can*didates in 107 constituencies. The 149-name* list, however, does not include any detained figures.

Asked for an explanation, Brotherhood spokesman Maamoun El-Hodeibi said: "They are exercising their constitutional right. This is an individual decision. They alone can decide whether or not *to run in* the elections. What we know is that the 16 have filed requests with the prison authorities to carry on with the required candidacy procedures."

El-Hodeibi did not disclose names on the grounds that "we do not have enough information because communication with the prisoners is very difficult".

However, other Brotherhood sources said that those running for election from prison include: Dr Essam El-Iryan, deputy secretary-general of the Doctors' Syndicate and a former MP, who will be running in Giza against Supply Minister Ahmed Gweili; Dr Mohamed El-Sayed Habib, a professor at Assiut University who will be running in Assiut; and Hassan El-Gamal, a former MP who will be running in the Cairo constituency of Al-Manial. The sources said *their defence lawyers will campaign on their* behalf.

Maj. Gen. Mohamed Bedeir El-Minshawi, the interior minister's assistant for election affairs, told a news conference last week that Brotherhood members awaiting trial can run for election as long as they have not been sentenced by the court.

But Mustafa Mashhour, a leading Brotherhood figure, said the group did not "entertain many expectations of this move". The government, he continued, could arrange their trial "within 24 hours. The court could then hand out sentences quickly, thus depriving them of the right to run for election."

Even if they were actually elected to the Assembly before their trial ends, a scenario Mashhour described as "very unlikely under the circumstances," their parliamentary membership would be revoked if they are sentenced. "In all cases, it is a losing battle," he said.

Other Brotherhood sources said that if the accused members were sentenced before the *deadline for nominations*, the group would replace them with other candidates "who are on a waiting list".

Maj. Gen. Fouad Allam, a former chief of the state security investigation department, charged that by nominating its detained members, the Brotherhood sought to embarrass the government. "They want to win public sympathy by playing the role of victim, but mostly what they are trying to do is to embarrass the government," Allam said. *He added, "If they win, they will have a card* to use against the government. If they fail, the excuse is always ready — the elections were rigged."

He did not expect the military court to pronounce judgement before the elections. "There are a lot of defendants to deal with," he said. "So it will be some time before judgement is handed down, possibly not till after the elections."

Islamist journalist arrested

IN THE continuing crackdown on the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, Salah Abdel-Maqsoud, a member of the Press Syndicate's council and also a Brotherhood member, was arrested last Friday on charges of publishing anti-government propaganda.

Abdel-Maqsoud was taken by law enforcement agents from Cairo Airport, where he was due to board a plane to Istanbul, and referred to a military prosecutor. He was remanded in custody for 15 days.

According to defence lawyer Abdel-Moneim Abdel-Maqsoud, the journalist was questioned by the prosecutor about an article which he published last August in *Al-Shaab*, mouthpiece of the Labour Party, defending the Muslim Brotherhood. "Police found copies of this article in the possession of some Brotherhood members who had been arrested earlier," the lawyer told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. No literature "of any kind" was found on Abdel-Maqsoud himself, his lawyer added.

Salah Abdel-Maqsoud declined to answer the prosecutor's questions on the grounds that the Press Syndicate's council was neither informed of, nor represented at, the interrogation, the lawyer said.

The council met on Saturday night to discuss ways of showing solidarity with Abdel-Maqsoud and issued a communiqué denouncing his arrest. "The council expressed its absolute rejection of the arrest. The council's chairman, Ibrahim Nafie, has contacted senior officials to inquire about the matter," said council member Magdi Mehanna.

The Syndicate's *Liberties Committee* also met on Sunday and called for a sit-in at the Syndicate's headquarters next Saturday. "We respect the military," said Mohamed Abdel-Qoddous, the committee's chairman, who is also a Brotherhood member. "We do not want to get into a confrontation with the ruling regime, but we are going to make as much fuss as it needs to see that our colleague is freed."

Salah Abdel-Maqsoud is a regular contributor to *Al-Shaab* and a staff writer for *Al-Liwa Al-Islami*, a newspaper that promotes radical Islamic thought.



Catching the Islamist train

Continuing a series on the political parties contesting the November general elections, Amira Howeidy traces the roots of the Labour Party, chronicles its switch to an Islamist ideology, interviews its leader, Ibrahim Shukri, and sounds out political experts on the party's performance

When the Socialist Labour Party was founded by Ibrahim Shukri in 1978, with the backing of then President Anwar El-Sadat, it was widely believed that it would not amount to much more than a "loyalist opposition" to Sadat's own National Democratic Party. But Shukri, a socialist who had his roots in the radical Misr Al-Fatah (Young Egypt) Party, quickly broke loose from Sadat's attempt to control his new party, denouncing the peace treaty with Israel, which he had earlier supported, and opposing other government policies and actions.

"President Sadat had hoped that the Labour Party would always support the government, and not display any opposition. This explains his anger," Shukri wrote in the party's mouthpiece, *Al-Shaab*, in response to Sadat's criticism of Labour in a speech to the People's Assembly in 1981. He went on to list Labour's differences with government policy: "The party had to take a clear stand against many freedom-restricting laws, such as the law of ethics and the press freedom law. We also had to object to normalising relations with Israel and to urge Egypt to retract its endorsement of the Camp David agreements."

But Labour, which at that time included a spectrum of ideologies ranging from Nasserism to socialism to radical nationalism, lacked an organisational infrastructure and did not represent a cogent, let alone weighty, political force.

In 1984, after Adel Hussein, a Marxist convert to Islamist activism became a member, the party underwent major upheavals which led to a virtual Islamist takeover. "At that time, the party suffered from ideological confusion," Hussein told the *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "There was no general agreement on the Islamic framework or the need to comply with *shari'a*. Some wanted to raise the banner of Islam, some did not believe in Islam at all, and others did not really know what they wanted."

Analysts agree that Hussein's arrival shook the very foundations of the party's structure, dividing members into pro-Islamist and pro-socialist factions. Other members simply left the party.

"We did not force anyone out," insists Hussein. "Everything was done democratically. Otherwise people could have resorted to the law. What happened was that the majority of members found the new line more representative of what they wanted. It also won new members who were looking for an Islamic party."

In the 1984 People's Assembly, the party had four MPs — all appointed by Sadat. Labour had failed to qualify for parliament because its candidates won less than the eight per cent of the national vote required by law at the time. But in the 1987 elections, and after forging an alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Liberal Party, Labour won 21 seats in the Assembly (plus 36 for the Brotherhood running on the Labour ticket), making it the largest opposition force in the House and earning Shukri the title of "opposition leader".

A comparison of the party's 1984 and 1987 manifestos provides a clear picture of Labour's switch to Islamism. The 1984 programme mentioned that the party has its roots in Young Egypt, denounced a "consumer-oriented" *infitah* (economic open door policy), but supported a "production-oriented" *infitah*. Advocating Arab unity, it called for the creation of a united Arab states and for the strengthening of the Arab League as a first step. The platform also emphasised social justice by linking wages and pensions to the cost of living.

But in the coalition's current programme, there is no mention of social justice, a united Arab states or the Arab League. However, there is a provision that Arab integration and cooperation with Islamic states in every domain is essential for Egyptian national security. Non-alignment is also considered necessary for an Islamic resurgence, while Zionism is branded as "our most dangerous enemy".

The Brotherhood's entry into the party drove more members out and some of them decided to take legal action against the Labour leadership. They were led by Abul-Fadl El-Gizawi, a lawyer who filed a suit contesting the legality of the coalition. Other members held their own meeting and passed resolutions holding Shukri accountable for infringement of the party's principles.

But this internal crisis did not trigger the party's collapse, as some had predicted, because new members came forward. And the coalition did not end after the 1987 election but, according to Shukri, continued in the 1989 *Shura* Council elections and the 1992 local council elections. Gradually, the party's Islamist line became even more radical and *Al-Shaab* began to adopt a harsh tone in criticising government policies. It also opened its pages to Brotherhood leaders.

There are doubts, however, that the Labour-Brotherhood alliance will continue in the run-up to the November elections. The abolition of the slate system and the return to individual candidacy has made the coalition redundant, analysts believe.

"Labour and the Brotherhood are two independent entities," Hussein explained. "But the fact remains that we are both part of the Islamic trend and both riding the same train. We support and strengthen each other. In the same context, we encourage all other Islamic institutions such as Al-Azhar and any peaceful Islamic activity."

1995 elections

Labour is nominating around 120 candidates in the November elections. The Brotherhood is fielding around 160, including 16 detainees facing trail. Some Labour and Brotherhood candidates may find themselves vying for the same seat.

Shukri is running in Sherbin, Adel Hussein in Nasr City and Abdel-Hamid Barakat in Imbaba. The Labour candidates include two Copts and two women.

1995 platform

Based on the 1987 programme, this year's platform focuses on "comprehensive reform from an Islamic perspective", according to Magdi Qorqor, the party's assistant secretary-general. The platform calls for the amendment of the constitution to emphasise Egypt's Arab-Islamic identity and provide clear demarcation lines between the executive, legislative and judicial authorities. It also calls for lifting restrictions on the freedom of expression.

Declaring opposition to terrorism and all forms of armed violence, the programme recommends greater democracy as the best means of dealing with the problem. It also urges the increase of wheat production to achieve self-sufficiency, and recommends agricultural cooperation with Sudan.

Funding

According to Qorqor, the party's main source of funds is the annual membership subscription of LE1. Like other parties, Labour receives an annual grant of LE100,000 from the *Shura* Council. The party has also made money by selling pilgrimage visas to Saudi Arabia, which they were allocated by the government, thus realising an annual profit of LE150,000. But the practice ended this year because the party was not allocated any visas.

Membership

According to party officials, Labour has approximately 400,000 members.

Ahmed Hussein



Ibrahim Shukri

Islamism's melting pot

Labour Party leader Ibrahim Shukri, 79, is a veteran politician and activist with a long history of struggle against the British, Israel and the monarchy in pre-1952 Egypt. A leading figure in a student uprising against the British occupation in 1935, he was shot and wounded by the occupation forces.

In 1948 he formed a student regiment that travelled to Palestine to take part in the war against Israel, but did not travel with them. He was a member of Ahmed Hussein's radical Misr Al-Fatah (Young Egypt) Party, which later changed its name to the Misr Socialist Party, becoming its deputy chairman in 1948. Two years later, he was elected to parliament, becoming the first socialist MP in Egypt's parliamentary history. He was detained several times, the last of which in 1952, but was released after the outbreak of the 1952 Revolution. He was appointed governor of the New Valley in 1974 and minister of agriculture in 1977. After resigning, he established the Socialist Labour Party the following year, with the blessings of then President Anwar El-Sadat

The original name of your party was the Socialist Labour Party but the word "socialist" was dropped, and the party has been closely associated with the Islamist trend since it forged an alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood in 1987. Why the switch from socialism to Islamism?

When I thought of establishing a new political party in 1978, I felt that the most appropriate name would be Hizb Al-'Amal [translated: labour or action], meaning a party of action. I wanted to call it the Islamic Labour Party but realised that this would be illegal because the formation of parties on religious foundations was prohibited. The closest thing that I could think of was the Socialist Labour Party which is close to the name of the party [the Misr Socialist Party] that I headed before 1953.

But our programme included Islamic precepts, even before we adopted our current position. It laid a stress on the fear of God and the importance of holding onto religion, without necessarily mentioning the word "Islam". Our programme also stated that Islamic *shari'a* should be the main source of legislation — a provision which Sadat included in the constitution. And we supported the Muslim Brotherhood during the 1950s when they were having problems with President Gamal Abdel-Nasser. So, our Islamic orientation is not exactly new.

Why, then, did the Labour Party not ally itself with the Brotherhood before the 1987 elections?

This would have been a beautiful thing, but it was out of our hands. The fact is that with the establishment of the New Wafd Party, many Brotherhood members, like Salah Abdou Ismail, Mohamed Abdel-Qoddous and Sheikh Abdel-Ghaffar Aziz, felt that it would be wise for the Brotherhood to ally itself with the Wafd in the 1984 elections. But when they got to parliament, it was we, and not the Wafd, who supported their position on the necessity of applying *shari'a*.

In 1987, I thought it would be best if all the opposition parties formed an alliance and ran on the Wafd's electoral slate. At first, both the Wafd and the other parties agreed. But a week later, the Wafd's higher committee announced that there would be no coalition. On the same day, I was contacted by the leaders of the Brotherhood and the Liberal Party, who suggested that we form a tripartite coalition, running on the Labour ticket. We came up with a joint platform under the motto "Islam is the solution".

It was the use of the slate system in the 1987 elections that led to the tripartite alliance. With the individual candidacy system in operation for this election, why do leaders of the coalition parties continue to insist it is still functioning when it clearly is not?

Of course, there is a difference between the scope of the coalition formed during the 1987 election, and what is happening at present. Now we can say that we are coordinating the choice of candidates and constituencies. Both the Brotherhood and the Liberals are coordinating with us, but plans have not been finalised yet because many Brotherhood members who were planning to run for election have been arrested. So, we are still working on it.

But in view of the arrest of the Brotherhood members and the ambiguous position taken by the Liberals, how can it be said that the Islamic Alliance is still alive?

We are not obliged to run on the same slate or present a joint platform. But I do call for coordination, as we have had in the past.

I should point out that the 1987 elections was not the only time that members of the Islamic Alliance have worked together. There was coordination in the 1989 *Shura* Council elections and the local council elections of 1992.

I believe that coordination should be enlarged to include other parties. This has been achieved with the Nasserists and we are talking with the Wafd in order to coordinate in some constituencies. I expect that there will be run-off elections in many constituencies and a higher degree of coordination will be needed then.

The Islamisation of the Labour Party has caused divisions within party ranks, with some members expressing disapproval. How do you view this?

We are proud that all our policies are presented to the party's general congress or supreme committee, although it takes time and effort. But, in the end, the majority of members agree with the party's line.

Some observers believe that Labour will not achieve the success it did in 1987 because it is running separately from the Brotherhood. What are your expectations?

I don't agree. I believe that Labour and the other opposition parties have some hope, although the media is being used to propagate the "achievements" of the ruling party. But most of the people's problems have not been solved. It is impossible to live decently on the present average income. Cases of corruption are everywhere and there is talk of land and cement "mafias".

What's more, we have been living under emergency law for 15 years now, something which has never happened in any other country in the world. I am not saying that it will be easy to achieve the results we want. However, the issue here is not the degree of the people's response but the integrity of the elections. How can there be a clean election in the absence of guarantees? All we can do is insist on the implementation of the guarantees currently included in the election law.

In short, if the government gives us clean elections, then we have hope. But if it manoeuvres to come up with results serving the interests of NDP candidates, then this is a different situation.

Does this mean that you oppose the idea of inviting international observers to monitor the elections as the party's secretary-general, Adel Hussein, suggested?

Inviting international observers will not amount to much more than the symbolic monitoring of some constituencies in Cairo by a handful of NGOs. It would not achieve anything. Would they go to Upper Egypt? Of course not.

All we want is adherence to the constitution. This is in the interest of both the people and the government itself. The NDP does not have to achieve a 90 per cent victory. No harm would befall them if they achieved 60 per cent. This would be to the credit of President Mubarak.

It has been noted that Labour and the Nasserists are coordinating quietly, unlike other parties. Is this a prelude to a future alliance?

We were Nasserists even before Gamal Abdel-Nasser. Nasser was a member of the Young Egypt Party and many of his actions after the revolution were originally Young Egypt ideas. These range from small things like digging up the statue of Ramses II, to great achievements such as the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company in 1956.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Opposition blaster

The Labour party's mouthpiece, *Al-Shaab*, is recognised as the country's most fiery opposition paper — a distinction that has often brought its editors and writers before state prosecutors

The thrice-weekly *Al-Shaab*, the official mouthpiece of the Labour Party, is possibly the most hawkish of all opposition newspapers, using fiery rhetoric to lambast government policies and publishing provocative headlines, sometimes in bold red type.

Its stories have often landed its editors and writers in trouble. In its last three issues, front page space was devoted to defending its editor-in-chief, Magdi Hussein, against charges of libel brought against him by Alaa El-Alfi, son of Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi.

Magdi Hussein and his predecessor, Adel Hussein, are the architects of the newspaper's editorial policy of scathing attacks on corruption, Zionism, American hegemony, the Oslo agreement, the proposed Middle East market and Westernisation.

"As an opposition newspaper, *Al-Shaab* has become sharper and more radical in opposing the peace with Israel," commented Awatef Abdel-Rahman, a professor of journalism at Cairo University.

Both Marxists-turned-Islamists, Adel and Magdi Hussein are, respectively, younger brother and only son to the founder of the pre-1952 Young Egypt Party, Ahmed Hussein. Their editorial policy is reminiscent of that adopted by the Young Egypt Party's newspaper before 1952. That paper is well remembered for once publishing large photos of beggars on its front page under the banner headline: "These are your subjects, your majesty". Adel and Magdi Hussein are said to have brought the same school of journalism to *Al-Shaab* which prints such frontpage headlines as "No stability, no security and no supremacy of law in this country" and "Fighting corruption should begin with the removal of three high officials".

At its inception in May 1979, *Al-Shaab* propagated socialist and nationalistic ideals similar to those adopted during the era of President Gamal Abdel-Nasser. According to Awatef Abdel-Rahman, the newspaper shifted to its Islamist orientation following Adel Hussein's takeover in 1985. "Many changes took place, from top to bottom, and there were a lot of problems. Many in-house reporters were not given assignments, particularly the Copts, who preferred to move to other newspapers. But the change did win the newspaper a new readership."

The newspaper has come under criticism for its fiery language, described by Abdel-Rahman as demagogy, particularly when addressing Islamist issues. "They argue and insist that Islam is the solution; does this mean that the money investment companies were the solution?" asked Abdel-Rahman, in a reference to so-called Islamic money investment companies, accused of fraud and shut down by the government a few years ago. "The reader is bound to react negatively and this is not in the newspaper's interest."

"We are no demagogues," responded Magdi Hussein, who took over from his uncle Adel Hossein last year. "We are an honest opposition newspaper. We have to be sharp and harsh in addressing national and Islamic issues to reach the hearts and minds of our readers. Unless we use this tone, our message will be lost."

Although it shares the nationalistic line of some other opposition newspapers, *Al-Shaab* writers are mainly Islamist figures. In addition to regular articles by Magdi Hussein, Adel Hussein, who is now the Labour Party's secretary-general, and Hilmi Murad, the party's deputy chairman, the newspaper prints contributions by Muslim Brotherhood figures and other Islamist writers. Occasionally, however, articles by two Coptic members of the Labour Party appear on its pages.

The party leaders' articles are usually lengthy pieces, which, Abdel-Rahman says, are "not in line with trends in modern journalism... We sometimes see long tracts in the newspaper which should have been printed in the party's political pamphlets."

Abdel-Rahman also argues that the newspaper's sharp tone in addressing Islamic issues has laid it open to the charge of fanaticism. "This does not encourage writers from outside the party to contribute because the newspaper seems to be exclusive to party members and Islamist-oriented figures."

Magdi Hussein was not the first *Al-Shaab* staffer to have problems with the law. Last year, the newspaper's military correspondent Abdel-Sattar Abu Hussein was detained in a military prison for publishing what was described as "top secret information". And Hilmi Murad was held overnight at a police station for criticising a cabinet minister on the newspaper's pages. The confrontation between *Al-Shaab* and the government reached its peak, however, when Adel Hussein spent 25 days in police custody at the beginning of the year after anti-government literature was allegedly found on a plane seat which he had occupied.

The case against Magdi Hussein, expected to be heard next month, will be the first time Law 93 for 1995 has been invoked against a journalist. This controversial law provides harsh penalties for the publication of false or malicious news. Many analysts believe that in passing this law, the government was targeting the opposition press, and *Al-Shaab* in particular.

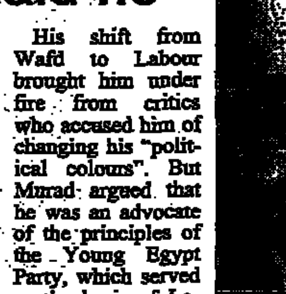
Their Young Egypt origins notwithstanding, Murad and Hussein arrived at Labour's Islamism via highly different routes — liberalism and communism

The minister who said no

Hilmi Murad, 76, Labour's deputy chairman, began a legal career as an assistant district prosecutor after obtaining a law degree in 1939. Ten years later, he became a lecturer at Alexandria University's law school, teaching labour law, and then moved to Ain Shams University, where he taught political science. In 1963, he founded the Workers' University and became its president, later moving to Beirut where he headed the United Nations financial and administrative centre.

Murad came into the public eye when he was dismissed from the cabinet by the late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser for opposing his policies, only a year after he had made him education minister in 1969. Nasser did not stop at that, but issued a decree banning former cabinet ministers from working abroad for a period of five years following their exit from the cabinet. The decree was meant to prevent Murad from accepting a job offer from Kuwait University.

With the revival of the Wafd Party in 1978, Murad assisted in the preparation of the party's platform and became its spokesman in the People's Assembly. But the Wafd froze its activities shortly afterwards and Murad moved to the Socialist Labour Party, which was established a few months later. Murad, who is Ahmed Hussein's brother-in-law, the founder of the pre-1952 Young Egypt Party, also helped in preparing Labour's platform and was later made its secretary-general.



His shift from Wafd to Labour brought him under fire from critics who accused him of changing his "political colours". But Murad argued that he was an advocate of the principles of the Young Egypt Party, which served as the basis of Labour's ideology. As for Labour's switch to an Islamist ideology, Murad justified it by contending that Misr Al-Fatah's socialism was not Marxist-Leninist but Islamic.

Murad has often acted as a legal shield for Labour, providing legal assistance to party officials and *Al-Shaab* writers who were put on trial. He writes regularly for *Al-Shaab*, often fiery articles severely attacking corruption in official circles. His most prominent target was Abdel-Hadi Qandil, a former oil minister, who took him to court. Murad was imprisoned twice, the first time by Nasser, and the second by President Anwar El-Sadat, who ordered the detention of a large number of political figures with various ideologies a month before his assassination in October 1981.

Farewell to Marx

Adel Hussein, 63, the Labour Party's secretary-general, is running for election for the first time in his life, in the Cairo constituency of Nasr City. One of his rivals is a businessman who has been inviting voters to free meals of grilled *kebab* for the past three weeks. Asked what he could offer to compete with the *kebab*, Hussein smiled and replied: "hope".

Hussein is the brother of Ahmed Hussein, a prominent nationalist figure who founded and led the Young Egypt Party in the days of the monarchy. A political activist at the early age of 14, Adel Hussein formed student committees to oppose the British occupation and regularly joined anti-British demonstrations. As a student in the Faculty of Science, Hussein joined the underground communist movement and, as a result, was imprisoned between 1953 and 1956. After obtaining his university degree in 1957, Hussein was sent to jail again between 1959 and 1964. Upon his release he joined the staff of *Akhbar Al-Yom* newspaper and continued to work as a journalist for the next 10 years.

In 1974, Hussein began what he called a "long journey of scholarly research". The outcome was a two-volume study entitled *The Egyptian Economy: from independence to dependency*, which was briefly banned. Another controversial work followed under the title *Towards a New Arab Thought: Nasserism, development and democracy*, in which Hussein urged young people to move beyond the fundamentals of the traditional Egyptian schools of thought. After obtaining an academic prize from the Kuwaiti government in 1981, Hussein published his third work, *Normalisation — the Zionist plan for economic hegemony* in 1984.

This marked the end of Hussein's research years which he described as "a very fruitful period of my life during which I reached the peak of maturity, and which witnessed my transformation to an Islamist ideology". He began a new period of political activity by joining the Labour Party and focusing his efforts on crystallising the party's Islamist ideology.

He came under fire for the shift from Marxism to Islamism and was occasionally branded as an opportunist, willing to change his position to follow the latest political trend. Scoffing at this accusation, Hussein said: "I have been in the opposition under King Farouk and presidents Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak. So, how can I be a political opportunist? I have gained nothing, politically, financially or otherwise."

Was Labour's transition to Islamism a natural progression, or a reflection of its hybrid origins. Independent analysts offer various explanations

Old but also new

In discussing the ideological orientation of the Labour Party, particularly its slogan "Islam is the solution", we should point out that this trend has deep historical roots. It is not something new which the party adopted in the last few years. Labour is the continuation of the pre-1952 Young Egypt Party which later became known as the Misr Socialist Party.

If we go back to the ideological principles of Young Egypt and its "10 commandments", we find that they were a successful combination of Egyptian nationalism, pan-Arabism and Islamism. These principles were upheld by the Misr Socialist Party.

Consequently, with the establishment of the Labour Party in 1978, it was only to be expected that the Islamist trend would be part of its platform.

What happened in the last few years, however, is that the party focused more on the "Islamic solution" after it forged a coalition with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Liberal party on the eve of the 1987 elections. This new, but also old, trend has its roots not only in Young Egypt but also in other pre-1952 political groups. In fact, some historians believe that those groups were a continuation of Mustafa Kamel's National Party whose platform was a mixture of Egyptian nationalism and Islamism.

Mohamed Emara
Islamic thinker

In the Brothers' boots

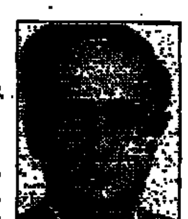
In talking about the Labour Party, two facts have to be taken into consideration. Firstly, that it is a continuation — both in terms of principles or people — of the old Young Egypt Party which had a composite nationalistic-religious-socialist ideology. Secondly, that Labour was established as a result of an agreement between President Anwar El-Sadat and Ibrahim Shukri to form a socialist opposition party acceptable to the state. These two facts shed light on the party's politics and ideology.

Labour's main problem is the ambiguity of its ideological framework. Because this framework is a mixture of Islamist, socialist and nationalist trends, the party may embrace one or other of these trends in a certain situation. The predominant trend right now is the religious or Islamist trend.

This accounts for another paradox because it will undoubtedly lead to competition with other Islamic groups, led by the Muslim Brotherhood. I believe that the alliance which was formed at one point between Labour and the Brotherhood was intended to face common external challenges, rather than reflect an authentic uniformity of thought. Thus it is expected that this old coalition could turn into fierce competition at any moment, particularly as the Islamist trend is viewed as a horse that many political forces are vying to bet on, believing that it's a winner.

However, the arrest of the Muslim Brotherhood members could leave the arena wide open for the Labour Party to lead the Islamist trend. This is a possibility because Labour is nominating candidates in electoral districts where the Islamist trend predominates, apparently in the hope that it will take over leadership of this trend from the Brotherhood.

Although this is a very delicate and complicated issue, politics are politics. The competition for the leadership of the Islamist trend is still very open and no one can claim that it has been settled in favour of the Labour Party.



Osama El-Ghazali Harb
Editor-in-chief of Al-Ahram's *Al-Siyassa Al-Dawliya* (International Politics)

Politics of ambivalence

In discussing domestic politics, one has to point out that the Egyptian legal system has managed to disfigure the political parties. This is because most of the forces that needed to have political parties, such as the Islamists, Nasserists and Marxists, had to join already existing political parties in order to be able to express themselves legally, and not necessarily because they supported the platforms of those parties.

Examples include the secret communist organisations which could only speak up by joining the leftist Tagammu Party, and the Islamist movement, represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, which entered the People's Assembly only by means of forging the tripartite alliance of 1987.

In the light of this, one can easily see that one of the Labour Party's biggest problems is political ambivalence. This has had a negative effect on the party's internal structure. Divisions occurred. Many Nasserists left the party because it was no longer a channel for expressing their Nasserist ideology. Other members, who owed allegiance to the pre-'52 Young Egypt Party, also quit.

After its conversion to Islamism, Labour dropped its vague socialist mottos and introduced strident Islamist slogans in an attempt to absorb a part of the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence, which Egypt has witnessed since the late 1970s.

The party did benefit from the prevailing Islamist "climate", particularly after it forged the tripartite coalition with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Liberal Party. In fact, both Labour and the Brotherhood made gains. Labour gained from the strong Brotherhood groups and their grassroots support. And the Brotherhood found in the Labour Party a channel for projecting its political views, both among party members and the public at large. This has had a big impact on Labour because its politics and platform were shaped by the Brotherhood.



Nabil Abdel-Fattah
Expert at Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies



American Jews opposed to the peace process in the Middle East demonstrated on Monday outside a meeting of the National Advisory Council on Jewish Relations which PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat was due to address. Arafat and some 180 of the world leaders are in New York to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations (photo: AFP)

Rebel trouble encircling Sudan

Rebel groups in the Horn of Africa are getting support from Sudan, to the detriment of Khartoum's relations with its neighbours. **Mohamed Khaled** reports

Last week Ethiopia mobilised its troops along *its borders with Sudan*, placing them on full alert in anticipation of potential incursions by Khartoum-backed rebel groups.

This development adds to the already poor relations between the two countries, highlighted by Ethiopia's accusation of Sudanese involvement in the attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's life during his visit to Addis Ababa in June.

According to some Sudanese opposition sources, the Ethiopian forces are concentrated along the border strip from Jebel Booma in the south up to Um Hagar and Humara, close to the Eritrean border.

Salah Galal of the opposition Sudanese Umma Party described the Ethiopian move as a reaction to the new threat from Sudan. "Over the last few weeks the Sudanese government has announced that it has succeeded in bringing together two Islamic organisations, *Djihad Ritra* (the holy war of Eritrea) and the Oromo People's Salvation Front, in a united military front. Recently some military camps belonging to this new front were established along the Sudanese-Ethiopian boarders in the Abu-Ramad area, near Damazine, the Fashaka area and other places."

For its part, the Sudanese government has accused Ethiopia of providing military support to the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) led by John Garang, but Danial Kody, representative of the SPLA in the Middle East, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "The accusation is meaningless, the SPLA has no joint borders with Ethiopia. The areas in southern Sudan adjacent to the Ethiopian boarders are held by the South Sudan Independent Movement (a rival southern opposition movement)."

According to both the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments, the Sudanese government has for a long time supported both the *Djihad Ritra* and Oromo rebels, especially in the refugees settlements of Eastern Sudan. Members of the two groups are recruited from these camps, and are then given military and ideological training as part of Khartoum's alleged project of exporting Islamic fundamentalism across the Horn of Africa.

Currently, and for the same reason, Ugandan military troops are massed on the southern borders of Sudan. Eritrea has also placed troops along its border with Sudan. There are two rebel Ugandan groups which have bases inside Sudan and receive generous support from the Khartoum government. One of them is a Christian fundamentalist movement, the Lord Resistance Army (LRA), which calls for Uganda to be ruled according to the Ten Commandments. The other is the West Nile Resistance Army (WNRA), an Islamic movement which supports the former Ugandan president, Idi Amin. Both groups have been trained and equipped inside Sudan and have launched themselves inside Uganda itself with the assistance of Khartoum.

The support of the Sudanese government for the rebel Oromo Islamic groups is a major source of tension. The Ethiopian government is still trying to settle its problems with ethnic groups that have not yet been accommodated within the federal state.

The largest ethnic group, the Oromos, represent just under half of the Ethiopian population. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) took up the armed struggle against the Marxist-Leninist government of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1975. The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromo (IFLO) appeared in 1978 to fight for an independent Islamic Oromo. Neither group achieved the level of organisation and effectiveness of other secession movements such as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and the Tigray People's *Liberation* Front.

With the overthrow of the Mengistu regime, the holding of multi-party elections and the adoption of the new constitution, Ethiopia seems to have taken the first steps along the road towards stability. Its new constitution has provided for the transformation of Ethiopia into a federal state with what Addis Ababa describes as far-reaching rights of self determination for individual ethnic groups.

At least, that is the hope of the Ethiopian government. The concern in Addis Ababa is that the Sudanese government may disturb the prospects of a peaceful settlement of ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia. With relations between the two countries so tense at the moment, Teshome Toga, the Ethiopian Ambassador to Cairo, told the *Weekly* that his government is waiting for a report on the matter from the UN Security Council. The matter, he said, is also in the hands of the Organisation of African Unity.

Meles Zenawi, the Ethiopian prime minister, has however expressed his pessimism about the possibility of a quick settlement between Sudan and Ethiopia. "Sudan insists on exporting terrorism and making available training camps for terrorists," Zenawi told the media this week.

Hrawi hangs on

After months of wrangling, and a lapse of forty years, Lebanon has extended the president's term in office. But not every one is happy, reports **Zeina Khodr**

For the first time in more than forty years and despite harsh opposition, Lebanon has extended the presidential mandate for another three years. President Elias Hrawi, whose six-year term expires *late next month*, accepted what he called this "valuable trust", after Syria gave the green light to the constitutional amendment.

In an address to the nation, Hrawi outlined his programme for the coming term. Liberating Lebanese land in the south and the West Bekaa from Israeli occupation will be the nation's priority, he declared. Hrawi stressed that cooperation and coordination between Lebanon and Syria will continue, describing it as strategic in the light of peace talks with Israel.

Hrawi's nomination for a second term needed a constitutional amendment by the parliament to allow for a one-off three-year extension without a new election. According to the original constitution, the 128-member unicameral chamber elected the president, who is supposed to be a Christian Maronite. *An extension was prohibited and the president* could not run for re-election until a period of six years has passed. The constitutional amendment is only the second of its kind since 1948. The then president Bishara Al-Khoury got another six years in office, but was forced to abandon his post three years later.

House Speaker Nabih Berri, along with a number of other deputies who had been staunchly against the extension, shifted position after Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad said in Cairo that Lebanese leaders had agreed to extend Hrawi's term. Assad's statement was understood by the Lebanese media as the cue that many officials had been waiting for to decide whether or not to back the amendment proposal.

One-hundred and ten deputies of the 121 present voted for the amendment, while 11 MPs voted against. Seven deputies were not present at the session.

Sources in the Beirut government were quoted as saying that Damascus prefers Hrawi with whom it has good relations at a time when regional peace talks are deadlocked. Lebanon has been coordinating its stand with Syria and has refused to sign a separate peace deal with Israel.

Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Boutros Sfeir, the leader of the largest Christian community in Lebanon, has vehemently criticised the amendment, calling it an outside decision. He said the people's will has not been taken into consideration. The amendment, said Sfeir, sidesteps Lebanon's laws and calls into question the democratic system in the country.

Deputy Salim Al-Hoss, a former prime minister, who heads the parliamentary "Bloc for Salvation and Change", voted against the amendment. *Referring to the fifteen years of civil war in Lebanon, Hoss said as Lebanon* was able to elect five presidents during the most difficult circumstances, there was no reason why it cannot elect one now that peace prevails. A potential candidate for the presidency, Deputy Nassib Lahoud, also rejected the amendment, saying it was a strong blow to the constitution and to democracy.

The amendment proposal had earlier evoked strong criticism in a number of Lebanese newspapers and some politicians had started a campaign to collect signatures against it. When put to the test, however, the two main parliamentary blocs supported the amendment.

Deputy Suliman Tony Franjieh, who heads the parliamentary bloc of eight deputies from north Lebanon, voted for the amendment in spite of earlier criticism. The about-turn was not without warning. Two months ago Franjieh said he would support the amendment if Syria agreed. Hezbollah deputies also shifted places and lent their support, after earlier criticising the move.

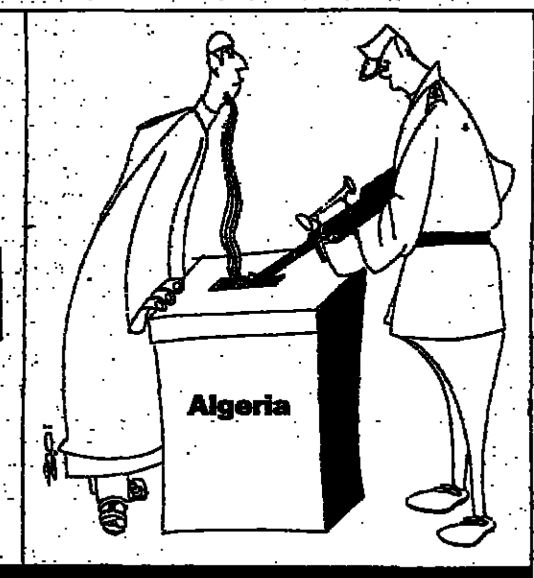
It is Rafiq Al-Hariri who has come out of this controversy as the real winner. According to Deputy House Speaker Elie Ferzly, Hariri will not resign as expected next month, at the end of Hrawi's first term in office. The resignation, he said, was not necessary following the extension of Hrawi's term in office. The national interest, he argued, would be served by maintaining stability at a time when peace talks are stalled and work was needed to carry out reconstruction and development projects initiated by the present cabinet.

The amendment followed months of uncertainty which have not helped the political and economic situation in the country. The Hrawi-Hariri team faces some equally tough challenges ahead. The government has to alleviate the dire socio-economic conditions endured by some Lebanese, if only to appease the opposition. A new electoral law has also to be drawn up. With parliamentary elections scheduled for next year, it could be as thorny an issue as the wrangling over the president's mandate.

Fathi







Libya cuts its UN losses

The door has slammed shut on Libya's attempts to get a seat in the UN Security Council, writes **Sayed Awad**

Under international pressure, Libya has relinquished its bid to become a member of the UN Security Council, giving Egypt the opportunity to occupy the empty chair.

The North African country was due to represent the bloc of African states as a temporary member of the UN Security Council. International opposition seems to have postponed that possibility at least for another two years when the seat becomes free again.

The main factor behind Libya's stepping down in favour of Egypt, rather than Tunisia which also put itself forward as a candidate, appears to be the close ties between the two countries. Egypt plays a greater regional role and, perhaps more importantly, has actively mediated between the interested parties in the Lockerbie crisis.

Libya had been nominated for the UN seat by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Africa is entitled to three seats on the UN Security Council. Rwanda and Nigeria currently occupy two of those seats but their tenure ends this year. The OAU backed Libya's nomination to represent countries north of the Sahara, along with Guinea Bissau, and also urged the Arab League, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, member states of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 to support Libya's nomination as well.

The OAU's sponsorship was aimed at containing any move to deprive Libya of the right to a UN seat because of its deteriorating ties with the West. Libya also worked hard at winning support for its candidacy at the Arab League's last meeting as a preliminary step to winning international support.

However, the United States, along with France and Britain, sought to foil Libya's plans by launching a counter campaign. The crux of their campaign was that it is "irrational" to elect to the Security Council a country subject to UN sanctions. Although Libya has shown a certain degree of flexibility, proposing a number of options to settle the Lockerbie issue, it has not fully complied with UN Resolution 731 which calls for the extradition of the two Libyans allegedly involved in the explosion of a PanAm flight over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988.

The second prong to the US campaign was directed specifically towards Arab and African countries.

The aim was to block any chance of Libya's nomination to the Security Council on the grounds of the "unworthiness" of the regime. Washington succeeded in getting Benin as well as Guinea Bissau nominated, thus fragmenting and eroding the support for Libya in the UN General Assembly. The US also succeeded in getting UN sanctions against Libya renewed.

But Libya has itself created another obstacle in its way to the Security Council by expelling 30,000 Palestinians and threatening to expel one million African expatriate workers — a move which has marginalised its support further.

The Libyan regime seems to have believed that its nomination would bring about a breakthrough in its isolation, demonstrating to the world that it still has political leverage. It also counted on the fact that support for the UN sanctions had lost momentum, calculations which now appear to have been premature.

Yet, Libya's own attitude towards the United Nations and its agencies is inconsictent. At times, it has threatened to withdraw on the grounds that the UN is an imperialist organisation that has disguised US actions with a cloak of international legitimacy. At other times, the same regime has zealously involved itself in UN activities, echoing calls to upgrade its effectiveness, reform its organisational structure and for increased support for its role in maintaining international peace and security.

This love-hate *relationship is a perennial* characteristic of Libya's overall relationship to the West in general and the US in particular.

When Libya realised that it did not stand a chance of getting the Security Council's seat, it set about cutting its losses. Egypt's nomination allows for the possibility of Arab representation at the Security Council. It will also enhance Egyptian mediation efforts in the Lockerbie crisis which could be useful in preventing any further deterioration in Libya's relations with the West.

Edited by **Mervat Diab**



Politics of promise

Abol Hassan Bani Sadr's association with the Ayatollah Khomeini began in 1962. Throughout Khomeini's exile, first in Iraq and later in France, Bani Sadr was one of his closest advisors, a member of the small group of men who plotted the shape of the future Islamic state. After the fall of the Shah, Bani Sadr returned to Iran where he was appointed foreign minister before being elected the first president of the Republic of Iran. But Khomeini, according to Bani Sadr, was determined to systematically break the promises he had made in Paris, and was soon at loggerheads with the new president. Ahmed Ali Badawi **spoke to Abol Hassan Bani Sadr in the French capital, where ironically, the former president has returned to a life of exile**



"When I was in Iran I did not oppose the mullahs because they represented religion but because they were false men of religion. These mullahs are the third façade to be supported by the West. First the West supported feudalism and it has gone. Then it supported the Shah and he has gone. The mullahs too will go."

Abol Hassan Bani Sadr was speaking to me in Paris, at his home in Versailles, one of the city's wealthiest neighbourhoods. He is no stranger to the city, having spent his formative years in the French capital, as well as being a close advisor to the Ayatollah Khomeini during his exile there.

"In Paris," he recalls in *Le complot des ayatollahs*, "Khomeini did not believe that the Shah would fall. Two or three times a week I would reassure him that the Shah would relinquish power. Khomeini was unsure of himself which is why he repeated whatever he was told. Reporters would ask him 'What is your frame of reference, your model? What is an Islamic state?' We weighed our answers carefully. To what period of our history could we refer? The Abbasid dynasty? The Umayyads? Or the period of the first four caliphs? We had to formulate an ideology worthy of a revolution, and we were all convinced that to replace one dictatorship with another, even under the banner of Islam, was pointless."

The Shah, of course, did fall, and Bani Sadr returned to Iran with the Ayatollah Khomeini to become the president of the Iranian Republic. On 10 June, 1981, after an escalating power struggle, he was dismissed from office and soon afterwards managed to escape to France — a return to exile, only this time a little more solitary than before. *Le complot des ayatollahs* plots the strangely circular path that led from Paris to Tehran and back again.

Bani Sadr's home in Versailles is the focus of many security measures. Paris is, after all, the city in which Shahpur Bakhtiar, last prime minister during the reign of the Shah, was assassinated. I negotiated that security when I went to interview Bani Sadr.

It was springtime in Paris and the French electoral process had reached the stage when an unlimited number of candidates are able to nominate themselves for the presidency. On 24 March French television showed the three frontrunners — Chirac, Baladur and Jospin — meeting with Salman Rushdi. It was an event with a guaranteed resonance for Bani Sadr.

"Here I am a prisoner of Monsieur Pasqua. Meanwhile Mr Salman Rushdi can travel anywhere he likes, and when he visits France he is received like a king."

Bani Sadr, a political refugee in France, is, one might assume from the disgruntled tone, allowed to remain as such on condition that he does not use France as a base for his activities or his movements to and from other countries.

In the interviews collected together in *Le Complot* Bani Sadr offers a privileged view of that first exile in Paris and his return to Iran when he, along with Khomeini's other advisors, urged Khomeini to adopt *shura* as their banner for Islamic government. They decided to refer back to the period of the Prophet's life which established essential principles and values such as equality among men and the participation by the people in government, which are postulates of democracy. Unfortunately, Bani Sadr continues "Khomeini was not true to his word. Once in Iran he would say, 'In Paris I found it expedient to say certain things. In Iran I find it expedient to refute what I said, and I do so unreservedly.'"

Back in Iran, amid a complex of fragmented power, Ayatollah Khomeini — who never wielded the authority or controledl people outside Iran thought he possessed — became the focus of ever-widening circles of intrigue. And when, finally, it became evident that the mullahs were preparing to take over power Iranian intellectuals were divided. On one side were the optimists, consisting mostly of members of the Tudeh Party (the communist party). They believed that the mullahs would bear the brunt of tearing down the old regime, but that they would need the intellectuals to build the new regime. The pessimists, on the other hand, among whom Bani Sadr counts himself, knew that the mullahs would persist in their despotism and that they had never given a moment's thought to creating a new, let alone progressive system. In *Le complot* Khomeini himself is quoted as believing that "To hell with intellectuals".

"We don't need them," the Ayatollah announced. "Intellectuals should leave the country."

At the heart of *Le complot des ayatollahs* lies the hostage crisis. It was during the 444 days in which the American hostages were held in the US embassy compound in Tehran that Bani Sadr became first foreign minister and then president.

His appointment as foreign minister came in the wake of the collapse of the government of Mahdi Bazargan. With hindsight the then foreign minister realises that the detention of the hostages was prolonged to create a pretext to bring down the Bazargan government. His first act, upon becoming foreign minister, was to go to the students who were holding the hostages in the American embassy and tell them, "You think that you have taken America hostage. What a delusion! In fact you've made Iran the hostage of the Americans."

When, at the height of the crisis, Bani Sadr was elected as president of the republic, the men closest to Khomeini maintained, the former president contends, close contacts with both President Carter and Ronald Reagan, the Republican nominee in the forthcoming elections. The hostage crisis topped Carter's pre-election agenda for if he succeeded in freeing the hostages it would radically alter his position in the polls. Khomeini, however, had already opted for Reagan, and consequently delayed the release of the hostages. And for Bani Sadr, who opposed the secret pact between Khomeini's men and Reagan, Reagan's victory in the American presidential elections marked the beginning of the end.

Simultaneously, Khomeini renounced his earlier pledge to Bani Sadr and his fellow insurgents to commit himself to a democracy and began the manouevering that would lead to Bani Sadr's dismissal. The president was subjected to a two-pronged attack. While Khomeini pressured the successive hand-picked heads of government into opposing the president of the republic, the mullahs contested his powers of authority. Soon Khomeini was in a position to ban Bani Sadr's picture from all government buildings, while the mullahs were allowed to pick off his aides one by one.

Between Reagan's victory in the US presidential elections in November 1980 and his inauguration in January 1981, the US president elect appeared keen to keep Bani Sadr in the picture. Having assumed the presidency, Reagan was intent on finalising the pact he had made with Khomeini's men. Consequently, Bani Sadr's refusal to deal with Reagan sharpened the conflict between himself and Khomeini's supporters, including the then head of parliament, new president, Rafsanjani. Ultimately, Iran was generously rewarded for its support for Reagan over Carter with the notorious arms deal (Irangate), concluded less than a month after Bani Sadr was removed.

In Iran, according to the solar *hijra* calender used by the Persians for over a thousand years, the celebration of the new year (Now Rooz) coincides with spring. For 13 days a special table is laid out in Iranian households, carrying seven items all beginning with the same letter of the alphabet. Thus it was that on 25 March I arrived at the home of Abul Hassan Bani Sadr to be shown into a room containing a table laid out in the traditional way with the seven required items, a mirror and a candelabra.

Outside, precautions were tight. Shortly after Bani Sadr's arrival in Paris, an Iranian was apprehended at Orly airport, carrying a substantial quantity of explosives. The man subsequently admitted to the French authorities that he was on a mission to assassinate Bani Sadr. So, had a death warrant been issued against him, as happened to his successor in the ministry of foreign affairs, Qotbzadeh? Bani Sadr insists that this is not the case, even though Khomeini had openly attacked him in a speech announcing that the former president deserved to die seven times over.

Bani Sadr continues: after he had left — he was careful not to use the word escaped— the country, someone asked Khomeini whether a *fatwa*, similar to that against Salman Rushdi, had been decreed sanctioning his murder. Khomeini, apparently, said no, on the grounds that Bani Sadr was a Muslim.

I mentioned to the former Iranian president that I, along with many others, had expected that he might seek refuge in Egypt, having escaped Iran. This, he insists, was never a possibility, suggesting that the source of such speculation was an announcement made by Sadat.

"Mr Sadat let it be known that if I wanted to come to Egypt I would be received with open arms. Unfortunately, the Egyptian president's announcement came when I was still the president of Iran."

"In my exile here, I don't engage in politics. Instead I study and write. I've completed one book on the Islamic philosophy of political and social life [*Le Coran et le Pouvoir*] which I hope to follow with a second volume.

But if things change in Iran...? Bani Sadr quickly interrupts:



'Of course things must change. The regime is currently supported by the West, but such support is only temporary... I'll return. I am not a political animal... I do, however, have a sense of duty. In the past my involvement in politics has always signalled a compliance with this sense of duty. I was never seeking to satisfy personal ambition'

"Of course things must change. The regime is currently supported by the West, but such support is only temporary. Since Khomeini died, Iran has borrowed $60 billion from the West, not the $43 billion claimed by Iranian leaders. Algeria is in a similar situation. Terrorism there is being backed by the French minister of interior Pasqua to give him the pretext to wage a campaign against the Algerians living in France."









When things change then, would he consider returning to Iran, and returning to politics?

"Yes, I'll return. I am not a political animal, though, in the sense that Chirac and Baladur are political animals. I do, however, have a sense of duty. In the past my involvement in politics has always signalled a compliance with this sense of duty. I was never seeking to satisfy personal ambition."

Bani Sadr insists that his opposition to the mullahs was grounded not in any secularist project, but because they were themselves misguided. Liberty, as Balzac pointed out, has a tendency to give rise to anarchism, anarchism to despotism and despotism to liberty. Is he not afraid then that the young generation that will 'correct' the revolution will rebel less against the hypocrisy of the mullahs than against their religiousity?

No, Bani Sadr is not afraid of that. "The new generation is strongly religious."

Given that in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East proponents of Islamic government have contorted Islamic principles to support conservative, if not reactionary notions, Bani Sadr's confidence appears a peculiarly Iranian, Shiite trait. I suggest this and he concedes.

"This I grant. Islam for us is a form of protest, not assertion. It is renunciation [of false concepts] not submission."

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past
T.S. Eliot

I left Versailles, and the former Iranian president, carrying a copy of *Le Coran and le pouvoir*, the volume in which Bani Sadr moves from historical, political and social themes into the realms of metaphysics.

The book argues forcibly against perceptions of Islam as a retrograde, fanatic religion that compels absolute submission and constantly invokes the call to holy war against infidels. The Qur'an, Bani Sadr tells us, teaches tolerance and justice. It proclaims the duty to fight oppression — the oppression of the poor, of women, of peoples — because the greatest blasphemy is the practice of tyranny. The Qur'an condemns the cults of race and class, of nation and of personalities, just as its revelation of divine unity denounced polytheism. It affirms the dignity of man and the right and ability of every individual to determine his own fate.

Throughout the pages of his book, Bani Sadr insists that the Qur'anic message, mystified, barbarised and exploited for political ends, must be retrieved. And in his reaction against the distortion of traditions, Bani Sadr embarks on a rigorous and impartial attempt to lead his readers back to the very source of Islam.

In doing so the dualities in Bani Sadr's personality meet, the religious scholar with the politician, the man of tradition with the contemporary intellectual, the radical writer with the freedom fighter, the abstract philosopher with the practical historian and the faithful Muslim with the Renaissance man, widely read in all the religions that have preached tolerance and humane values.

The core of Bani Sadr's argument about the shape of an Islamic state revolves around the overly simple understanding of divine unity prevalent in the West and among Muslims. He argues for the term's broader ramifications, insisting that, beyond the belief in a single Creator, it embraces a methodology of thought and behaviour that demands the destruction of polytheism in all its manifestations; in society as race and class; in politics as imperialism, totalitarianism and tyranny; in culture as demagoguery and absolutism. The Qur'an's condemnation of the deification of the pharoah offers, he argues, a vibrant model to Muslims of all ages as to how to strive towards the true essence of unity. An implicit comparison is drawn between the pharaoh and the tyrants who surrounded him, as described in the Qur'an, and those today who amass enormous sums of money to spend on accumulating weapons of mass destruction, at the expense of their populations. As Moses beseeched the believers to destroy the wealth of the Pharaoh, the faithful believer today must struggle to reestablish justice on earth by demolishing today's idols, including the corrupt bureaucracy, and lobbyists and merchants of war.

It is in the section of *Le Coran et le pouvoir* that deals with the Imamate, however, that Bani Sadr makes his most important contribution to Islamic contemporary thought. Here, Bani Sadr insists that the divine will that created the world created man to be responsible for his own deeds. He cannot, though, assume this responsibility in the absence of liberty. Since liberty is meaningful only if man is free to create and to engage in the pursuit of knowledge, it must then include the freedom to master the modern sciences, to assess and choose between various methodologies and objectives, to criticise, to act and to develop. Criticism in this context, becomes an extension of the word *jihad*. It carries none of the associations of violence, but rather implies the effort the individual exerts towards rectifying imbalances in the world around us. The first such 'effort' involves criticising the injustices perpetrated by ruling authorities. A better *jihad* involves the injunction, then, to "tell the truth to the face of the oppressor". The supreme *jihad*, though, is the "jihad of the soul", the endeavour to be critical of oneself.

The responsibilities placed by the Creator on the shoulders of his creation can only be fulfilled if man is free. Bani Sadr argues that in political terms this translates into the struggle for liberty. Liberty, therefore, is axiomatic to the imamate that Bani Sadr wants to bestow on every citizen and this is how we should understand his term the "generalisation of the imamate". In earlier Islamic societies, the imam or the leader of the faithful alone was free to determine the fates of individuals. In contemporary Islamic society, according to Bani Sadr, every individual should be free to determine his own fate, so long as this does not impinge on the freedom of others. The rich and poor have equal claims to this liberty, and wealth, therefore, should not be wielded as an instrument of control. Furthermore, whereas in the past, religion and philosophy have frequently lent themselves to support the power of a chosen elite over many, contemporary religious thought should uphold the masses.

Bani Sadr is not so utopian as he might appear, nor is the world so simple. The society of equal and free citizens will only come about when the world arrives at the "ultimate" promise (*ma'ad*). In the interim, people must choose, through consultation — *shura* — an imam to govern them in a manner that does not contravene the latent principle of "the generalisation of the imamate". It is the imam's duty to uphold social justice, to prohibit the abuse of power and to delegate responsibility in fulfillment of *shura*. He must also preserve the bond between society and its armed forces and ensure that the armed forces do not become an implement for the perpetuation of power. At the same time, he must uphold the independence of the judicial authority as the basis for safeguarding justice. He must work to create an economically independent society in which there is equal opportunity for all, in which all forms of class and ethnic discrimination are eradicated and in which every individual has the right to own property and the right to earn money through honourable work.

The last chapter treats the notion of the 'ultimate" promise (*ma'ad*). In Arabic, "*ma'ad*" is derived from the same root as "*awda*" meaning the return, specifically the return of the past and the present at some point in the future.

"No act," Bani Sadr writes, "is achieved exclusively in the present. Every act includes something of the past, something of the present and ramifications into the future. A single act has its origins in the past, it is performed in the present and its consequences ebb into the future." The pages of *Le Coran et le pouvoir* comprise an important work by a unique figure. And as a sequel to *Le Coran et les droits de l'homme*, the volume is not so much a philosophical treatise as a lucid and erudite *jihad*, offering a practical, Islamic conceptual framework for government that addresses mankind's contemporary material, moral and spiritual concerns.

Countdown to Amman (3)

Baking a bigger pie



In the third of a series of interviews on the Middle East/North Africa economic summit in Amman, *Al-Ahram Weekly* talks to a prominent member of the Egyptian delegation

M. Shafik Gabr is president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt. However, in Amman he will be representing the Artoc Group for Investment and Development, of which he is chairman and managing director. Artoc is the only Egyptian corporate sponsor for the conference, assisting conference organisers, the World Economic Forum, with planning and logistics.

Do you think that the Casablanca and the Amman conferences are necessary to realise regional cooperation? Why should we superimpose a framework on regional cooperation?

The world is undergoing major economic changes as a result of the phenomenon of regionalism. Regional cooperation is expanding around the world as countries find areas of common interest. NAFTA, the EU and ASEAN are all products of realised common interests.

The Middle East has unfortunately been torn by conflict and war for years, and its residents have paid a high price. The opportunities wasted have been tremendous.

Between 1989-1992, trade between the region's countries, excluding Israel, was less than 6 per cent of their total trade, compared with 66 per cent among countries of the EU and 30 per cent among developing nations.

The concept of regional cooperation has great potential. And many avenues, which have been blocked until now, can definitely contribute to economic growth in many countries in the region.

The mechanism in Casablanca and Amman is just one of many that can promote this cooperation. Other mechanisms include bilateral and multilateral agreements, as well as groupings such as the GCC and the Maghreb Union.

While people should not expect much from the Amman conference, they should not ignore it. Amman is a step in a long process and, like anything else, you get out of it as much as you put into it.

If the countries negotiate from a position of common interest, all will gain. Instead of trying to walk away with a bigger piece of the pie, we must enlarge the pie so that all may share in the gains. This philosophy would make the conference successful. Partisanship, however, will obstruct the proceedings.

Why do you think it is important for Egypt to attend such a conference, and why are you personally attending?

I am a firm believer that as Egypt was a cornerstone of the peace process, the same will hold true for its role in realising any true regional economic cooperation. There are four reasons for this. Historically, Egypt has been a regional leader and pace-setter. Geographically, any type of tourism or cooperation has to go through Egypt. Situated in a unique geographical position in the heart of the Middle East, Egypt is at the crossroads for trade and tourism. Politically, even after Egypt's peace with Israel, Egypt has been called upon in almost every instance to mediate in other peace talks.

Economically, Egypt may not have the largest GDP in the area, but statistics reveal that its macroeconomic indicators are better than those of Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. We have more streamlined economic policies than Israel. From 1990-1995, Egypt has implemented economic policies that are considered among the best in the world.

Egypt is a part of, and a bridge between the Arab, Islamic, Middle Eastern, African and Mediterranean spheres. As an international businessman from Egypt, I believe that Egypt, to the benefit of all, will play a key role in regional cooperation.

Therefore, Egypt should be well represented in any mechanism for economic cooperation, and its views should be presented as strongly as possible. At the conference, we have 11 speakers in 11 workshops, dealing with tourism, banking, legal frameworks and water resources. Egypt's voice is going to be heard loud and clear.

What gains from Casablanca prompted you to decide to go to Amman?

Even if I didn't realise any gains in Casablanca, that doesn't mean I wouldn't go to Amman. I definitely did not walk away with any personal or corporate benefits in Casablanca; none whatsoever.

However, Casablanca was a necessary political step to provide the umbrella for working towards Amman and after Amman. The same approach was adopted in Madrid, but I don't know why when it's politics people accept it, when it's economics people are surprised.

In Madrid people sat in a hall and listened to speeches. But Madrid was a prelude to the Oslo Agreement, the multilateral meetings, the Jordanian agreement and the Syrian negotiations. Casablanca was a mechanism which got the ball rolling for regional economic cooperation. I hope that Amman, and what follows from Amman, will be better. These are long and painful negotiations. As an Egyptian businessman I believe in Egypt's role and in its objectives. That is why I decided to go to Amman.

From your experience in Casablanca, what do you think are the benefits and drawbacks of mixing government and business representation?

The benefits are that all parties will have the unrestricted opportunity to hear each other out. The drawbacks are that politics sometimes overshadows business and you get more speeches than practical solutions.

In Casablanca there were many political plenary sessions and many political speeches which were well intended but lacking in details and recommendations of what is needed for true economic regional cooperation.

You will notice that some mechanisms were recommended in Casablanca such as the regional bank, the tourism board and the regional business council. We will see whether agreements on these mechanisms will be reached in Amman.

Do you think these mechanisms would help translate politics into business?

Definitely. The regional bank will definitely contribute positively and would serve the economies of the region. If we have a good regional business council then businessmen can interact among themselves and identify joint ventures.

What concrete steps has the Egyptian delegation taken to ensure that there will be less politics and more business in Amman?

We have recommended workshop themes, and we have participants in the workshops. If you have a workshop on water resources, I can't see many political statements being made there. The theme of these workshops will definitely contribute to a more businesslike environment.

Egypt has also put forward a book detailing its vision, perspective and projects aimed at furthering regional cooperation. All these would hopefully give a more economic slant to the conference.

How do you see the role of the EU and the US in Amman?

I think the EU and the US are going to act as catalysts because it is in their interest to see that there is peace and stability in the region.

Egypt's official position is that there cannot be full-fledged economic cooperation without comprehensive peace. What is your opinion on this position, considering that business dealings are already underway?

Full and comprehensive economic cooperation will not take place without comprehensive peace. But in the meantime, institutions and mechanisms can be built, and business dealings and special bilateral agreements between countries can be reached.

Let's not be misled by the fact that some contracts are being signed. This is not regional cooperation. Regional cooperation is when business and economic cooperation impacts positively on the growth rates of the region's countries in such a way that the man in the street in Cairo, in Tel Aviv and in Amman, feels that his standard of living has improved.

It is not a question of buying a few ashtrays or selling some clothes. What is happening now is just the beginning. We are just scratching the surface of the region.

Interviewed by **Ghada Ragab**

A region with potential

Ahead of next week's summit in Amman, **Mohamed A El-Erian** explores the main features of Middle East/North Africa economies

High-level representatives from governments and the private sector are scheduled to gather in Amman next week for the second Middle East/North Africa (MENA) Economic Summit.

The region is of significant importance in the world economy: The MENA region, defined to cover the Arab countries, Iran and Israel, encompasses an area of over 15 million square kilometres with six per cent of the world population. It has abundant natural resources, including about two-thirds of the world's oil reserves. It is a large exporter of labour to certain regions such as Europe, and an importer from others such as Asia. With an average per capita income that is twice the level of developing countries as a whole, it constitutes an important market in the world economy.

Countries vary, in some cases considerably, in terms of key economic characteristics. The extent of variation is illustrated by four simple indicators, population, per capita income, export intensity, and economic structure. Country population ranges from 0.6 million (Bahrain, Djibouti, and Qatar) to around 60 million (Egypt and Iran).

The four richest countries in the region — Israel, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates — have an average per capita income of around $15,000 compared to $250 for the poorest (Somalia and Sudan). This results in a degree of income disparity within MENA that is over three times that of the European Union. Per capita exports range from $25 in Sudan to $11,000 in the United Arab Emirates. Finally, the region includes both countries with relatively diversified economic structures (such as Israel, Morocco, and Tunisia,) and countries relying to a large extent on a single sector such as oil or agriculture.

The region has significant under-exploited economic opportunities. Despite substantial natural resources, human and financial endowments, as well as firmly established economic links with industrial countries, MENA's per capita income growth has been low, thereby aggravating unemployment problems. Intra-regional merchandise trade is relatively limited, as is intra-regional investment. A significant portion of residents' financial holdings is held outside the region rather than invested in employment-creating activities within it. Compounding this, the region has accounted for less than five per cent of international private capital flows to developing countries. Of the non-oil countries in the region, only Jordan, Israel and Tunisia have succeeded in directly tapping industrial country capital markets, thereby supplementing domestic savings in funding productive investments at home.

Several countries remain very vulnerable to adverse developments in their external environment. As a result of limited economic diversification, a number of countries are vulnerable to external developments, particularly in the oil market, international food prices, and weather conditions. MENA, as a region, is 15 times more vulnerable to external developments when compared to developing countries as a group and 30 times more than industrial countries. The resulting disruptions to the domestic economy have adversely affected investment and growth.

Achieving sustained high economic growth is the main economic challenge facing countries in the region. With an average population growth exceeding that of other developing countries and a relatively young age structure, countries in the region face the challenge of providing employment for a growing number of nationals entering the labour force. In some countries, the challenge is compounded by existing high levels of unemployment. Successfully meeting this challenge requires sustaining high levels of economic growth. This requires progress in structural reforms.

Countries face similar structural reform policy agendas. Since MENA countries differ in their starting points and in the progress they have made in policy implementation, the exact nature of the remaining policy challenge varies from country to country. Nevertheless, they face a fairly common policy agenda. It centers on establishing a more conducive environment for private sector-led growth through further reforms of public finance and public enterprises, enhancing domestic and foreign investments, improving domestic financial systems, additional deregulation and liberalisation of economic activity and strengthening human resource development.

There is now a wide recognition of the economic policy imperatives and several countries have embarked on adjustment and reform programmes: A number of countries, including but not limited to Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, have recently implemented more or less sustained macroeconomic reforms, focusing on fiscal adjustment supported by tight monetary policies. Their economic performance has been aided in several cases by progress in implementing structural reforms. Others are initiating comprehensive policy reforms in the context of well-defined medium-term programmes.

The adjustment and reform process is a continuous one, requiring timely adaptation. International experience indicates that a successful process requires at least four factors. First, maintaining the momentum of a comprehensive and self-reinforcing approach. Second, implementing the necessary mid-course adjustments, especially in response to unanticipated external developments. Third, establishing the required institutional framework and human capabilities. And, fourth, minimising transition costs through proper policy sequencing and well-targeted social safety nets.

With sustained policy implementation, the region can look forward to a reinvigoration of its growth and development process. Countries in the region clearly have the potential for sustaining high economic growth and benefiting more fully from the globalisation of the world economy. Exploiting this potential requires determined policy implementation, as demonstrated by the high-performance countries within MENA. Given the economic links in the region, the beneficial impact of a generalised reform effort is substantial as individual country developments are supplemented by positive region-wide effects.

Mohamed A El-Erian is Deputy Director of the Middle Eastern Department of the International Monetary Fund. This articles draw on a study entitled "Macroeconomy of the Middle East and North Africa, Exploiting Potential for Growth and Financial Stability" prepared by Mohamed A El-Erian, Sena Eken, Susan Fennell and Jean-Pierre Chauffour. The article reflects the views of the author and not necessarily those of the International Monetary Fund.

Consumers challenge the market

In the first conference of its kind, economists, officials and consumer protection activists last week debated the rights and duties of the Egyptian consumer, reports **Mona El-Fiqi**

The rights of consumers under a free market economy and the role of governmental and non-governmental organisations in protecting consumer rights was the theme of a two-day conference attended by more than 450 participants last week.

The conference was organised by the Consumer Protection Society (CPS), one of 18 similar non-governmental groups established during the past few years. During that period, the lifting of state control on prices and the implementation of the liberalisation policies gave a sense of urgency to the issue of consumer rights.

The conference was inaugurated by Minister of Supply and Home Trade Ahmed Guweili and was attended by representatives from several concerned authorities and ministries.

Conference chairman Siddiq Afifi, who heads the CPS, explained that the consumer protection movement in Egypt is voluntary and non-profit making and that Egyptian consumers are in urgent need of protection from commercial fraud.

Afifi asserted that governmental and non-governmental organisations should cooperate to enforce consumer rights and bring about discipline in the markets. He suggested that high level officials such as ministers and governors should employ qualified personnel to address problems related to consumer protection.

For his part, Supply Minister Guweili pointed out that his ministry plays an important role in consumer protection by providing basic goods and monitoring prices in the market. Guweili said the ministry has presented to the People's Assembly a draft law that would protect the market from monopoly and other unfair market practices.

Tesbi Rashad, a professor of household economy at Alexandria University, described access to information as "the first consumer right". She argued that providing information about quality specifications and prices through the media helps consumers make informed decisions about goods and services. Rashad also stressed that increased public awareness of health-related issues would force producers to adhere to specifications and thus help cut health care expenses.

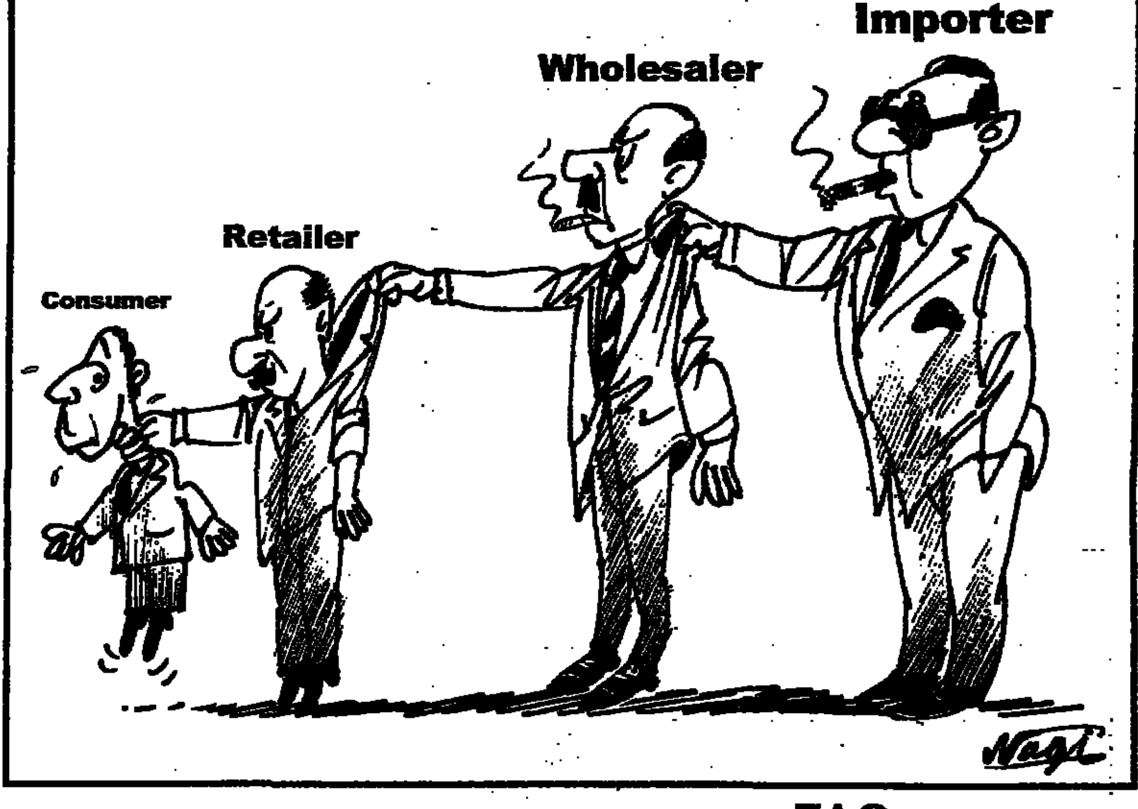
Consumers also have a duty to rationalise consumption, encourage local production and refrain from buying overpriced goods, Rashad pointed out.

Briefing the conference on the role of the Egyptian Organisation for Standardisation and Quality Control (EOSQC) was Fayza Ismail, an official of EOSQC. The organisation sets specifications for foodstuffs and monitors their application in an effort to guarantee consumer safety, she said. To date the EOSQC has a list of 3,500 specifications which correspond to international standards and should be followed by producers, she explained.

Khaled Abu Ismail, representing the Egyptian Federation of Chambers of Commerce, conceded the need for consumer protection but demanded similar protection for traders against illegal and low-quality imports.

Conference recommendations called for launching a media campaign to inform consumers of their rights and duties, and the role of consumer protection societies.

The conference also called for new legislation to empower consumer protection societies, enabling them to effectively defend consumers. Chambers of commerce were urged to establish special offices to deal with consumer problems and resolve disputes.



Market report

Manufacturing still sliding

TRADING was slow on the capital market as a total of LE23.059 million worth of shares changed hands during the week ending 19 October, compared to LE40.3 million the previous week. The General Market Index lost 1.57 points to close at 211.81 points.

Once again the manufacturing sector suffered the biggest blows, dropping by 2.28 points to close at 296.69. Shares of the El-Nasr Clothing and Textiles Co. (Kabo) lost LE4 per share to close at LE165. Suez Cement's shares also declined in value, losing LE1.65 per share to reach LE41.6. Shares of the United and Arab Spinning and Weaving Co (Unirab) slipped by LE0.5, or 12.28 per cent of its per share value, to stabilize at LE43.5. El-Mansoura Spain for Garments suffered the greatest loss in its share value. It lost 42.8 percent of its share value to close at LE9.07.

Other manufacturing sector companies, however, registered gains. Egypt International Pharmaceuticals' shares gained LE3.5 per share to close at LE126 per share. Last week they had climbed to LE122.5. Shares of the General Company for Paper Manufacturing (Rakta) increased in value by LE1.2 to close at LE29.01. The Tenth of Ramadan Spinning Industries Co. registered the greatest gain with its shares shooting up in value by 20 per cent to level off at LE12.The financial sector index recorded a slight decrease, slipping by 0.81 points to close at 180.96. The value of the Commercial International Bank's (CIB) shares slid from LE524.5 last week to LE519.99 per share this week. El-*Watany* Bank's shares lost LE0.65 to close at LE28 per share.

In the service sector, only the shares of Misr Hotel changed hands. The company's shares lost LE1 to close at LE68. However, it was enough to cause a 0.66 point drop in the sector's index, leaving it at 136.8 by the end of the week.

In all, 15 companies registered an increase in share value, 24 decreased and 48 remained unchanged.

The general market index

214
213
212
211
210

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

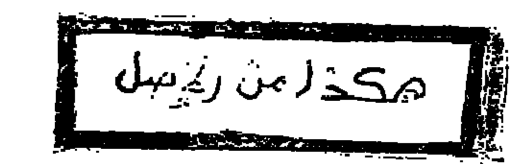
FAO prepares for food summit

IN RECOGNITION of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's contributions worldwide, Egyptian officials celebrated the FAO's 50th anniversary by calling a special meeting to review its work.

Among the participants were Youssef Wali, the deputy prime minister and minister of agriculture and Atef Bukhari, assistant director general and regional representative of the FAO's Near East Regional Office.

Wali praised FAO's efforts to combat malnutrition and hunger, and reviewed the organisations's accomplishments in Egypt. He also announced that President Mubarak has accepted a FAO invitation to attend a world food summit next year in Rome. FAO has initiated 12 projects in Egypt including the establishment of expert crop management, improvements systems, integrated population and family-planning education, agricultural extension and emergency assistance for farmers in flooded areas.

Egypt is one of two Arab countries that joined 44 other nations in signing the agreement forming FAO on 16 October, 1945 in Quebec, Canada. The official cooperation agreement between Egypt and FAO, however, was signed in August 1952, FAO will also hold its own festivities by calling a ministerial meeting chaired by FAO's director general. The meeting will be the launching point for a World Food Summit in Rome in November, 1996.





A page of history

Gamal Nkrumah reports from New York on the largest ever gathering of world leaders in the history of mankind


The UN commemorative meeting had its humorous moments: Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton share a joke


Castro steals the limelight



A sombre Arafat listens attentively

Fear stalked the United Nations in the run-up to three of the most decisive days in its half a century's history. Security was tightened in and around the UN headquarters as terrorists vowed to ruin celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the organisation's foundation.

Accredited media workers were advised to be there by 7am on Sunday 22 October. Braving bomb-sniffing dogs and other less excitable beings purporting to uphold stiff security measures, some 2,000 reporters and cameramen from the four corners of the globe were scrupulously searched in the nippy morning air as they trooped into the gleaming glass building that houses the world body. The only consolation was the pink and purple Manhattan skyline at dawn.

Behind the parade of news events surrounding the commemorative meeting of the 50th General Assembly, a fierce battle was going on between the UN, the New York Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), on the one hand, and a legion of underground terrorist organisations who had threatened to turn the celebrations into a nightmare.

Last week, a van belonging to the United States Mission to the UN at 799 United Nations Plaza, a stone's throw away from the UN headquarters, inexplicably disappeared without a trace. Ten licence plates also went missing. The incidents were kept from the public and the diplomatic community in New York.

Meanwhile the UN was inundated with threatening phone calls promising to wreak havoc on the world organisation ostensibly dedicated to goals of peace. But, Ahmed Fawzy, the deputy spokesman for UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali, insisted in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly* that everything was under control. "We are pretty confident," he said. Fawzy disclosed that the UN was working closely with the Federal and New York State Security to combat terrorism and to ensure the protection of the visiting world dignitaries and UN employees.

The terrorist menace comes at a time when the UN is facing a severe financial crisis. By September 1995, outstanding contributions totalled $3.3 billion. According to Joe Sills, spokesman for the secretary-general, the total cost of the commemorative celebrations is estimated to top the $1.5 million mark. In an interview with the *Weekly*, he said that the UN had its own security personnel and emphasised that within the UN premises, New York State security had no authority. "We do not hire private security firms to police the UN premises," he said. "We do the policing ourselves," he added, noting that extras were recruited for the commemorative celebrations. "Mostly retired UN security men," he explained.

The Australian ambassador to the UN, Richard Butler, who is also chairman of the 50th Anniversary Session of the General Assembly told the *Weekly* that there were numerous obstacles that had to be overcome to ensure the success of the event. He described the UN's present problems as "yesterday's politics pursuing tomorrow's problem".

For three years, many of the 53,839 employees of the UN worldwide have prepared for its 50th anniversary through a host of consciousness-raising and public relations activities in its 185 member-states. In the end, though, it all came down to three days of five-minute speeches from the delegation heads, including some 150 presidents and prime ministers who converged on the UN headquarters this week. Keeping world leaders to such a short time limit was meant to break with the old mould of lobbying for national interests in international forums.

But old habits die hard despite incessant calls for change. At the most delicate and determining moment in its history, the UN has come under intense pressure to radically change the status quo. There was a consensus this week that changes in both the Security Council and the General Assembly were long overdue. The problem was that there was a myriad of conflicting political agendas. The North rallied to tighten its grip on the world body, pressing for the enlargement of the Security Council to include Germany and Japan. The South focused on the need to democratise the UN through the inclusion of non-industrialised nations in the Security Council. As Boutros Ghali said this week, "The UN is now and increasingly will be what we make of it."

He previously warned that there was an unwarranted preoccupation with the need to enlarge the Security Council while the real need was to reform the way business was conducted at the General Assembly.

It was in this context that one of the UN's severest critics broke the appointed time limit. US President Bill Clinton had insisted on a 25-minute speech until the US mission cut it down to 15 only a few hours before his address. He spoke for longer than any other world leader — like the leader of a country that accounts for a quarter of world economic output. The speech was still three times the allotted time and the symbolism of Clinton's clout was not lost on his listeners.

For the photo session, Third World leaders jostled for position to pose with Clinton who in turn scurried to appear next to Chinese President Jiang Zemin. Clinton and Zemin were joined by their French and Russian counterparts, Jacques Chirac and Boris Yeltsin. It was as if they deliberately sought higher profiles in a bid to fasten their exclusive hold on the Security Council.

The UN is a giant confounded by uncertainty. Far-reaching changes are in store but it is still not clear who will initiate them and how they will be instituted. Then, as Nabil El-Araby, permanent representative of Egypt at the UN, told the *Weekly*, "We do not share the view that the Secretariat should be constantly reformed so long as the reform means affecting its ability to serve the interests of the majority of the membership. The continuous lack of political will and determination to make the UN a living symbol of our common vision for a better tomorrow can only harm our people at the grassroots."

Leader after leader took the podium and, if it was Clinton who led the rostrum, it was Castro who got the accolades. If you prefer your news in images, picture a daughter leading a handful of demonstrators vociferously denouncing her daddy outside the UN headquarters. The daughter, Alina Fernandez Revuelta, who defected to the US a couple of years ago hysterically screamed "Down with Castro". More angry Cuban-Americans in a little flotilla, jealously guarded by a US Marine Corps squad, joined in the deafening anti-Castro chorus outside the UN building in East River.

Inside, Cuban President Fidel Castro received a thunderous ovation. It was the longest given any speaker at the 50th commemorative session, and Castro was met by a long line of adoring fans. Many of the employees ushering the delegates in and out joined in the rousing applause. A group of African secretaries excitedly rushed forward to greet him as he passed them by. "I had to touch him," Sarah sobbed in a scene reminiscent of the biblical account of the throngs that pursued Jesus. Incidentally, Castro was not included in a list of dignitaries invited to a sumptuous dinner hosted by New York Mayor Rudolph Guiliani at the Winter Garden of the city's World Financial Centre.

Instead, at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in the run-down, largely African American inner-city neighbourhood of Harlem, Castro preached in his battle fatigues to over 1,300 people. The multiracial crowd sat in the church pews chanting "Fidel! Fidel! Fidel!" as he ascended the podium. Angela Davis, the African American militant feminist of 1970s fame, gave him a fisted salute. So what are we left with? Images of an unforgettable week.

Party ended

THE UN ended its 50th birthday party minutes before midnight on Tuesday with promises to make the international body more effective. But the organisation's empty coffers have yet to be replenished.

The closing declaration expressed the determination of all members to work with renewed vigour in promoting peace, development, equality, justice and understanding among all the peoples of the world. It also promised to give the 21st century a UN equipped, financed and structured to serve effectively the peoples in whose name it was established.

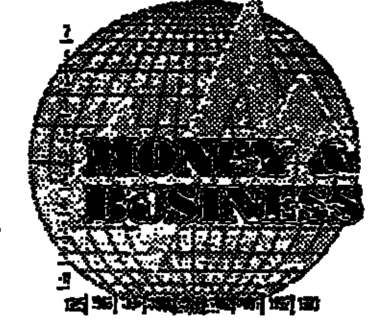
For three days, 185 kings, princes, presidents, prime ministers or their stand-ins offered a mountain of proposals for reforming the world body, including the enlargement of the 15-member Security Council. But there was no consensus on how many seats should be added and whether any new members should have permanent seats or have the same veto rights as the current five full-time members, or even whether those veto rights should be preserved. No concerted effort was made to remove the threat of bankruptcy hanging over the UN because of the backlog of arrears owed by member states.

A seminar on telecommunications

THE EGYPTIAN Petroleum Organisation held a seminar on Monday to review the latest in information technology and its application. At the opening of the seminar, Sameh Fathy, vice-chairman of the Planning and Projects Authority, delivered a speech on behalf of Dr. Mustafa Sharaawi, chairman of the Authority.

In the seminar, IBM experts reviewed the highly advanced systems displayed at the telecommunications conference in Geneva earlier this month.

MONEY & BUSINESS



Boom for some is not boom for all

THE FOOD and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) indicated in its annual report that the global economic boom has not been a catalyst in eradicating starvation which continues to be seen in 15 African countries suffering acute food shortage. The report, entitled *Food and Agricultural Status in 1995*, added that in spite of the great significance of the Uruguay agreement on agricultural-based trade, it may have minimal effects on global markets in the short run.

Faisal Islamic Bank to release annual report

ABDEL-HAMID Abu Moussa, director of the Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt, stated that the bank's board of directors have prepared the annual report for the fiscal year 1415AH which ended 29 May 1995. The report, carried out by the bank's accountants, discusses the bank's activities in terms of balances, losses and profits. The report is expected to be available Friday, 17 November 1995.

The bank's financial operations during the fiscal year yielded positive results in general. The total volume of transactions came in at LE6373mn, representing an 11.6 per cent increase over the previous year's LE5705mn figure. The bank's assets this year reached LE6227mn, an increase of 10.9 per cent over the previous year's LE5615mn. Customer deposits increased to LE4933mn from LE4511mn, a 9.4 per cent increase, while total investment funds climbed to LE5665mn from LE5042mn, a 13.4 per cent increase. Total returns for the bank reached a 39.1 per cent increase, moving up from the previous year's LE251mn to LE350mn. Subsequently, total profits have reached LE303mn, as opposed to LE210mn, an increase of 44.1 per cent. But investment account holders received good news with profits of LE246mn, up from LE201mn, a growth of 22.5 per cent. Finally, the biggest growth for the bank was seen in its allotments, which increased from a mere LE9mn to an overwhelming LE46mn thus marking a growth of 380 per cent.

Abdel-Hamid Abu Moussa

NBE and new job opportunities for young graduates in mobile outlets and marketing services

WITH THE advent of the year 1995, the economic reform programme was geared toward giving an impetus to enhancing the production and marketing of commodities with a view to accelerating the development process and raising the standards of living. In an attempt to support the Egyptian government's determined efforts to mitigate the negative repercussions of the reform programme, the National Bank of Egypt — being the animator of the Egyptian banking system — adopted a project for employing graduates in mobile outlets and marketing services. The project's contract was concluded by NBE, the Ministry of Supply and the Social Fund for Development.

The said project aims at creating new job opportunities for young graduates and the brackets heavily influenced by the adverse effects of the reform programme, besides paving the way for a new calibre of the said graduates to be future entrepreneurs. This is in addition to striking a balance between the demand for and supply of food and consumer commodities via supply increase and price control, as the multiple steps separating the producer from the final consumer will be eliminated and commodities will directly reach the consumer through a sophisticated marketing system serving internal trade in new cities and informal communities.

The project is envisaged to be implemented on four successive phases in the course of 7 years, establishing 2000 marketing and services projects which will provide 4000 permanent job opportunities besides 2000 temporary ones.

At the same time, the Social Fund for Development has allocated LE40mn loan for this purpose to be managed by NBE in cooperation with the Ministry of Supply. The implementation of the first phase is to take place within the coming weeks in Cairo, Giza and Qalyubia. The bank shall provide loans to beneficiaries with a maximum of LE50,000 each to be repaid within 6 years with a grace period of 12 months. The loan bears an 9 per cent simple annual interest rate.

The project is forecasted to shatter trader's monopolies of some basic commodities besides creating job opportunities for young graduates, especially after relieving the from the provision of possessing a premise for their activities. This is in addition to supplying food and consumer goods at fair prices.

Safaga Palace: Holiday Inn's newest resort

A NEW hotel in Egypt opened recently. Holiday Inn Safaga Palace Resort is the newest addition to hotels along the Red Sea. The official inauguration of the hotel took place under the guidance of Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui, and was attended by a number of hotel and tourism executives in Egypt.

Sayyid Hussein, the general manager of the hotel, explained that opening celebrations will last until the first of December, and that many surprises are in store for the hotel's clients. He added that advertisements for the hotel would be appearing next week in newspapers and magazines.

A touch of spice

FED UP with the usual burgers, fried chicken and pizzas which constitute the bulk of Egypt's fast food? Well, Homi Wadia has created blitz-food with a difference. Kanti's self-service restaurants will be Egypt's first Indian quick food outlets — at reasonable prices too.

Although the menu is of necessity limited, there is still an array of exotic dishes to titillate the curious and the not-so-curious. The chain's specialty is the Kanti roll, mildly spiced chicken or meat kebabs rolled with egg in a typical Indian bread baked on the premises. There are also a range of bite-sized snacks called *pakoras*, meat or vegetable, deep-fried in a chickpea batter, an for the hearty eater a small selection of curries and *biryanis*. And to round off in true style there is a range of desserts such as *gulabjamuns*, milk and cottage cheese dumplings in rose flavoured syrup. Fresh salads at the salad bar are topped with Indian dressings spiced with dried pomegranate and mango.

While most of us think Indian food synonymous with a large dose of chillis, concept creator Homi Wadia prefers to leave the choice to the customer. Most of the food is moderately spiced and if you want the heatwave, just ask. Nothing is pre-cooked and orders are prepared in 10 to 20 minutes.

Now you don't have to splash out to go Indian. For an average of just LE8 or LE15 at the most you can sample the subtle flavours of India in your own home. Home delivery will begin soon.

Kanti's are at Lebanon Square, Mohandessin and 104 Abbas El-Akkad Street, Nasr City and in downtown Hurghada.

Building business with Benin

MAHMOUD Mohamed Mahmoud, minister of economy and foreign trade, has met recently with Mrs. Sikrato, the minister of commerce and trade of the Republic of Benin. The two ministers discussed means of boosting trade and investment activity between the two countries, which focused on the importance of implementing trade agreements as well as promoting participation in exhibitions set up by the two countries. Discussions also dealt with having a cooperative committee set up in order to overcome the obstacles hindering the development of commercial activities between the two countries.

Al-Ahram Weekly

First things first

The death of nine Israeli soldiers on patrol in southern Lebanon has cast a cloud over the recent back-slapping and festivities marking the signing of the Taba agreement between the PLO and Israel in Washington two weeks ago. Rabin is concerned, but not for the right reasons.

Rabin's charges, that Al-Assad is supporting guerrilla groups, are unlikely to win him any points with the Syrians who are already indignant over his refusal to consider the land-for-peace settlement to the issue of the Golan Heights.

But as Rabin told Christopher, *peace is attainable, "assuming we have a serious partner."*

The question is, how serious is Rabin. With Israel adamant about maintaining an early warning station on the plateau following its gradual withdrawal, can this be viewed as a serious commitment to diffusing an explosive situation? As it patrols southern Lebanon, in which it has carved a "security zone", and places its own troops, unnecessarily, at risk, there is little evidence that Israel is actively seeking a timely settlement to a decades-long dispute.

Syria, on the other hand, is asking that Israel prove its commitment to peace by withdrawing to its pre-1967 borders, thereby leaving the door open for the resumption of a dialogue. This is reasonable considering that Israel unlawfully annexed the territory in *1981*.

But as tension mounts and recommendations and mediation fall by the wayside, Israel simply continues to pose and ponder, talk and blunder, and comes no closer to realising a comprehensive settlement.

Syria's cards are already on the table. It has compromised by agreeing to a third-party operating the early warning system. The presence of international forces should provide Israel with the security it calls for. But the issue of Hezbollah is one of self-defence against an occupier, not one of promoting guerrilla warfare.

It is time for action, and the so-called "serious partner" must take a closer look at his own agenda before seeking a way out of the negotiations before they have even resumed.

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Great expectations

Ibrahim Nafie examines hopes and prospects for November's elections which could, he argues, result in the most significant parliament in Egypt's modern history



The parliament that will be formed after November's elections will be the parliament that steers Egypt to the threshold of the 21st century. It will do so against a background of extraordinary local, regional and international circumstances. *It will* have to shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that Egypt enters the next millennium from a position of advantage. For these, and for other reasons, people from across the political spectrum are pinning their hopes on the next People's Assembly, which, if it successfully addresses *the challenges ahead, will* become the most significant parliament in Egypt's modern history.

We have a right to expect the next parliament to exhibit a marked difference from earlier assemblies. People will expect a much greater degree of professionalism from the members of the assembly. Those elected will be expected to attend all the sessions in which legislation that directly effects the rights and interests of the populace is discussed. Elected members will be required to remember that in essence their function is to promote the interests of the general public through effectively participating in the drafting of legislation and the supervision of the executive. They are not there to serve narrow interest groups or to promote the interests *of a few constituency members.* Neither will their job descriptions include flocking to the offices of ministers in the quest for signatures. They are there to discuss major issues that are of public concern. It will be no longer tenable for members of parliament to excuse themselves from parliamentary sessions because they have to attend to the personal interests of their constituents. This may well be the case, but it does not constitute a *sufficient pretext for a* representative of the people to abandon his legislative and supervisory roles.

The public will expect the forthcoming parliament to be well prepared for its discussions of a legislative programme aimed at helping to solve many of their day to day problems. Issues such as import-export restrictions and the development of urban centres beyond the narrow strip of the Nile Valley have been discussed endlessly in previous parliaments. Now the public has a right to expect action, as it looks forward to a parliament determined to extend the scope of democracy by upholding the rights of all to participate in the political process. Parliament will be expected to enhance stability and security throughout the nation by ridding the country of the last pockets of extremist violence, which targets democracy itself for destruction.

It should be apparent by now that a great many hopes and aspirations are pinned on the next parliament. And there are signs that these hopes will not be misplaced. All of Egypt's political parties are participating *in the election, a fact that* contrasts favorably with past elections which were boycotted by some political parties. In the lists submitted by the National Democratic Party, more than 35 per cent of the candidates are new faces — another good omen. The new parliament, then, looks as if it will receive an injection of new blood, and will incorporate candidates selected on the basis of their reputation and political ability. Moreover, the elections will be, as President Mubarak has said, thoroughly Egyptian in their goals, methods and sources of finance.

Of course, in the end, it is the Egyptian voter who has the power to transform such hopes into reality. It is up to the voter to guarantee that the elections constitute an accurate expression of the popular will and reflect all shades of political opinion. It is up to the voter to decide, at the ballot box, who is qualified to represent the people and who is not.

The controversies that have often surrounded the voting process in the past will only be dispelled when everyone who has the right to vote actually avails themselves of that right. Certainly, the fact that elections will be overseen by 1800 members of the judiciary, and that electoral committees, charged with monitoring the integrity of the ballot box, will include representatives *of each political party, constitutes* grounds for great optimism. But however effective the judicial and representational supervision, it can be no substitute for mass participation. Only if the voters turn out in great numbers will the election result in a parliament that accurately reflects popular opinion. If those eligible to cast a vote fail to do so, they will have only themselves to blame when they discover that candidates who do not deserve to represent *the people are happily* ensconced within the People's Assembly.

Active participation is essential, since it is not only the most effective but the only guarantee that the new parliament will have its finger on the pulse of popular opinion, and consequently will be capable of promoting the interests and welfare of the population. In this context, it is encouraging that the political parties are fielding new faces in many constituencies. Moreover, it is not at all true that the recent arrests of members of the Society of Muslim Brothers were designed to prevent *them from participating* in the electoral process. The confrontation between the security forces and the Muslim Brotherhood began three years ago when the authorities received irrefutable evidence that the organisation had formulated a detailed plan to assume the reigns of power by 1998. The so-called 'enabling plan', *together with other* evidence, clearly suggests that the Brotherhood had resolved to avoid any direct confrontation with the authorities, preferring to leave such conflicts to the extremist groups, most of which sprang up beneath the organisation's umbrella. This, however, is not a major issue and should not be allowed to cloud the elections. The Muslim Brotherhood, was, after all, perfectly free to have its candidates nominated through *legitimate parties*, should they have so desired. They could then have won seats and been represented in the forthcoming parliament as long as they complied with the same rules and procedures that apply to everyone else.

Egypt's voters, then, are themselves standing on the threshold of the 21st century. It is up to them to cast their vote in such a way as to ensure that a responsible and effective parliament be formed after the election, capable of leading Egypt to the end of the century and beyond. The electorate have much to expect. They also have much to contribute through the exercise of their democratic rights.

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Updating the UN

The fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations is a golden opportunity to probe how far a radical restructuring of the world organisation can go. **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** discusses the issue

The celebrations marking the golden jubilee of the United Nations have highlighted the need to redefine the international organisation's responsibilities and prerogatives, not to say its very raison d'être. Everyone knows it was originally conceived as a forum for the promotion of global peace and cooperation; less clear, however, is what this function entails in the specific conditions of the present world order.

As it hits the half-century mark, the UN is clearly in deep trouble. Among the many indications of this *is the economic crisis it faces, the* worst in its history, which is symptomatic of a much deeper crisis touching not only on its own organisational aspects, but on structural aspects related to the current world order. Another is that the momentous changes brought to the fabric of international relations by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the bipolar world order have not been met by corresponding adjustments in the structure of the UN to enable it to cope with new realities.

Thus it is saddled with a number of anomalies that are hard to justify, either in logical or legal terms. For example, Russia inherited the Soviet Union's permanent seat in the Security Council, including its right of *veto. Although Russia cannot* be considered the natural successor of the Soviet Union, either geographically, ideologically, or even in terms of international status, the issue was not put to a debate inside the UN; the decision was implemented simply because it responded to Washington's will.

Another anomaly is the marginality of Germany and Japan in the organisation. The UN was initially founded to consecrate the defeat of the two nations in World War II, and *to build a new world order based on* the eradication of Germany's Nazism and Japan's militarism. But although the two nations have risen phoenix-like from the ashes of their defeat to become economic giants and leading states on the world stage, they have yet to enjoy a UN status commensurate with their present power. While current efforts to update the UN may result in granting them permanent seats on the Security Council, this will not be thanks to a general debate in the General Assembly but, again, contingent on the will of the United States.

This raises the question of whether Russia enjoys veto rights while Japan and Germany do not because the former is a nuclear power while the latter two are not, which in turn raises the question of whether, in an age where economic incentives are meant to have replaced military *deterrents as the cornerstone* of the world order, membership in the nuclear club is still a prerequisite for permanent membership in the Security Council. And, if so, is Israel entitled to great power status as the only Middle East state in possession of a nuclear arsenal, with the blessing of the United States?

Even if we come to the inescapable conclusion that a total restructuring of the UN is necessary, there would still be the question of finding a mechanism, acceptable to *all, by which this process could be* effected. The only precedent to which we can refer in this regard is the replacement of the League of Nations by the United Nations. The two world organisations were separated by a world war, and restructuring the organisation called upon to embody 'world order' became a necessity to cope with the lessons drawn from that dreadful experience. But restructuring has now become imperative without the occurrence of a new world war.

It could be argued that the demise of the Soviet Union is tantamount to a third world war. But if the Soviet Union has disappeared as a state, a regime and an ideology, it has suffered no military defeat. Its collapse was due to a totally unexpected scenario: an internal implosion, not defeat in a world war. The ideology of the state changed, not its ruling establishment. This could explain why the Soviet *state became the Russian* state with minimal change, not only on the internal front, but also at the global level. However, such a change was bound to have far-reaching consequences in international relations.

At a previous time, the UN was the only 'no-man's land' where the two key actors in the bipolar world game could meet and negotiate. However mutually exclusive their ideologies, the UN remained the only place where the Cold War was prevented from becoming a global hot war and where mutual annihilation was checked. But now that one of the two superpowers has disappeared, what role can the UN play? On all the really hot issues, the UN was relegated to the sidelines: in the Middle East peace process, in the Bosnian crisis, in Cyprus, in Rwanda, in Kashmir, etc. Any progress in negotiations *has been thanks to US*, not to UN, intervention.

It has been said that the nature of war in the post-bipolar world game *has changed. Wars are no longer* waged between states. They are no longer fought by regular armies, but have acquired other characteristics: either supra- or infra-national, taking the form of terrorism, drug-smuggling, nuclear weapons blackmail, ethnic cleansing, etc. In these new-age wars, heavy weapons have no role to play. Increasingly, loyalties are less to nation-states, the system on which the UN is built, than to economic groupings and tribal or ethnic affiliations. How can the UN be effective in this new global environment?

All states have declared the need to restructure the UN. The non-aligned states met in Cartagena, Colombia, last week, and vowed to seek reforms in the UN that would *give the developing countries of the* South more clout: not just a bigger voice but real decision-making power. However, the US is more insistent than ever to remain the only key actor in the UN as *primus inter pares* between the developed nations of the North. It is to be questioned if a unilateral system of political decision-making at the global level, rather than multilateralism, can be a stable formula for the post-bipolar world order.

Novel inspiration

By Naguib Mahfouz

I have been asked, in the past, why I have produced only five short plays in my writing career as compared to 50 novels.

When inspiration comes to the writer it comes complete, as form and content, not as a vague idea to be put into verse or short story form. I am a novelist inasmuch as the ideas that come to me have tended, always, towards the form of a novel. Several of my short stories actually began life as parts of novels — retrieved from manuscripts that I had put to one side.

Strangely, a number of critics have been convinced that the process worked in reverse and that I took short stories and expanded them into novels.

All of the five short plays I did write I wrote after 1967. It was a time of great trauma, and in a way the plays are an extension of the kind of inner dialogue that is such a strong feature of the novels I wrote during the same period. At that time, I was thinking mostly in terms of dialogue. It was, though, a period which came to an end, and I returned to the novel.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

By Hassan Fouad

Gaddafi's gamble

THE NATIONAL and party press this week focused on the United Nations' 50th anniversary, preparations for the forthcoming parliamentary elections and the plight of *Palestinians stranded in* no-man's land along the borders between Egypt and Libya.

In **October** magazine, Editor-in-Chief **Ragab El-Banna** wrote a three-page cover story under the headline "50 years on... does the UN have a future?" *which* was devoted to the UN's anniversary celebrations. In it he said: "It is the US which puts pressure on the Security Council to prevent it from *passing any* resolution that condemns Israel. And what does the UN do when the US backs Israel's historical distortion: celebrating 3,000 years of the establishment of Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish kingdom?"

Al-Ahram on Saturday devoted a large section on its opinion pages to an article by UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali under the headline "The Non-Aligned Movement and the challenges of the post-Cold War era", marking the NAM summit held in Colombia last week.

On Sunday, **Al-Wafd** published a front-page editorial on *Libya's expulsion of* Palestinians entitled "A blanket conspiracy" in which it said: "What has happened amounts to a conspiracy. Gaddafi has gambled on aborting the PLO-Israeli peace process by expelling Palestinians working in Libya. Some believed that the Palestinian National Authority will put pressure on Israel to allow the return of the expelled Palestinians to the Occupied Territories. However, Israel clearly stated that it would not allow their return.

"Arab states followed suit and refused to allow them entry. Even though the crisis is a month old, Gaddafi's objectives have not been, and will not be, achieved.

"Israel has not backtracked on its decision, and neither has the peace agreement failed. Gaddafi's impulsive decision has triggered a human catastrophe *that* has stricken his brothers, while he reiterates talk of Arabism and Palestine. As for the civilised world, it has shown no interest in the matter and considered it a passing incident which does not warrant intervention."

'A return by Libya to its former hardline policies will not ease sanctions against it. On the contrary, this policy will become a pretext for tougher sanctions'
Makram Mohamed Ahmed

In **Al-Mussawar** magazine, Editor-in-Chief **Makram Mohamed Ahmed** wrote a three-page lead article entitled "Why should *Egypt* and the Palestinians bear the consequences?" in which he wrote: "If Libya is anxious to reinforce the right of the Palestinian people to return to their homeland, according to Libyan officials, why not wait until a Palestinian state is established?

"*Colonel Gaddafi wanted to* prove that Libya was capable of unsettling the situation in the Middle East, of exporting problems and of reverting to its old policies after failing to achieve success through a moderate approach.

"I believe that this is a mistake because a return by Libya to its former hardline policies will not ease sanctions against it. On the contrary, this policy will become a pretext for tougher sanctions being imposed on the Libyan people."

Al-Mussawar also published four pages of photographs under the headline "The plight of *Palestinians* on the border".

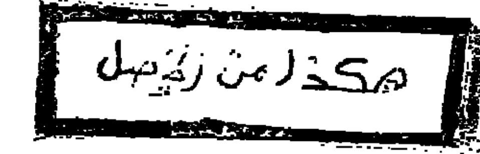
With the date of the parliamentary elections approaching, the satirical writer **Ahmed Ragab** wrote in his front-page column in **Akhbar Al-Yom**, commenting on the privileges offered to members of parliament: "Is a member of parliament in need of the People's Assembly's LE2,000 contribution to perform the *hajj* when a *fatwa* condemning the use of the state's money for funding the *hajj* was issued earlier? Would an MP who spent unreservedly in the election campaign require the Assembly's contribution to underwrite his travel and accommodation costs? Are MPs not the representatives of the people, who shouldered the heavy burden of the economic reforms' new taxes? Is the Assembly not a state institution which is required to join the people in tightening their belts? What are the purposes of such privileges?

"We do not accept the claim of those with ulterior motives who profess that the government provides assistance to the Assembly out of fear, or as a show of support for the Assembly. We believe that these privileges indicate a form of complicity between the government and the Assembly — against the people."

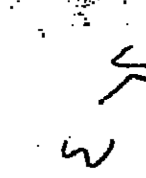
On the coming parliamentary elections, **Mustafa Amin** wrote in a back-page column in **Akhbar Al-Youm**: "The government is not hurt if some of its candidates lose the election. But it would be really hurt if even one of its candidates won a parliamentary seat by fraud."

'The government is not hurt if some of its candidates lose the election. But it would be really hurt if even one of its candidates won a seat by fraud'
Mustafa Amin

On the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organisation held in Cairo this week, **Ibrahim Shukri**, leader of the *Islamist-oriented* Labour Party, wrote in a front-page article in **Al-Shaab** newspaper under the headline "The tourism conference and the importance of maintaining historical sites": "Tourism is not about organised tours. Tourism is essentially a passion and a hobby involving visiting a particular place and getting to know it. Tourists are encouraged by what they have read and what they have been told by one of their relatives — perhaps a grandfather — about his memories of the place. Naturally, when the tourist visits historical and tourist attractions and finds a serious lack of regard for cleanliness he does not take away good *memories of the* place."







Close up

Salama A. Salama

An eye on democracy

Elections in the Arab world are few and far between. And even when they do take place few observe them or study their results. The result of this is that Israel is able to present itself as the only democracy in the Middle East.

Things, though, appear to be changing. At a time when slogans extolling the virtues of freedom reverberate around the world, and paying lip-service to them is a necessary rite of passage if one is to gain entry to the exclusive clique of democratic states, election season seems to have hit the region with a vengeance. The world suddenly opened its eyes to discover that elections and referendums have or are taking place in three Arab states.

In Iraq Saddam Hussein hurried to organise a referendum of the type all too common in the recent past of Arab states. The referendum, of course, was designed simply to confirm Saddam's authority. It was a transparent ploy, provoking only scorn. No one was fooled, least of all the Iraqi voters, who clearly understood that, in a climate of hunger, repression and economic blockade, they had little option but to vote for Saddam. Eight million of them 'confirmed' his authority. Saddam has announced that it is his intention to call a general election soon. Naturally, these will not be elections in the accepted sense, since they will be conducted under the tyranny of the Baath Party. They might, though, afford some distraction to the beleaguered Iraqi population.

Algeria's presidential election may well bespeak a greater level of democracy than Iraq's presidential referendum, since the officers who rule Algeria have permitted four candidates to stand against the current president, Liamine Zeroual. A fifth candidate, former Prime Minister Reda Malek, was excluded for unknown reasons.

Democracy in Iraq was no more than decor. In Algeria its forms are being co-opted to help the country escape the dilemma into which it slipped as a result of democratic elections. The majority of political forces in Algeria have, however, boycotted the presidential election on the grounds that it is, rather, putting the cart before the horse. They see it as an attempt to sidestep pressure for the holding of a free general election.

Using the outward forms of democracy to validate predetermined results is hardly the pathway to establishing democracy in any real sense. It is a self-serving exercise, undertaken, usually, in the interests of a single party.

Egypt, too, is looking forward to elections, though they will be very different to those held in Iraq and Algeria. Egypt's forthcoming legislative elections will include the participation of all political forces, including arrested members of the Muslim Brotherhood who are being allowed to put themselves forward as candidates from prison.

The government has guaranteed that the elections will be impartial and will be supervised by the judiciary. Assurances, then, have been given that the forthcoming electoral campaign will fall within recognised democratic norms. And in the light of such assurances one is inclined to accept the presence of international observers at the electoral process, or at least the formation of a neutral committee to monitor the elections.

We must take care to avoid actions that might be misinterpreted in such a way as to cast doubt over the electoral process. Doubts must be avoided at all costs. We do not want our elections to be merely decorative, as in Iraq, nor would we want them to be viewed as a democratic trick, designed to suppress political forces and block any change or advance.



Soapbox

Electoral ethics

There is a well known story about a pre-1952 parliamentary candidate standing outside the polling station offering voters half of a 50 piastre note as they entered and the other half as they left, provided, of course, that they had voted "correctly". Quite what the denomination of the note would have to be these days is anyone's guess, given levels of inflation. (Last year the going rate was, apparently, LE20). But denominations apart, money and elections have always made a combustible combination.

As the new parliamentary elections approach it becomes increasingly clear that electoral practices need to be codified. A code of ethics is badly needed.

Of course, money can buy votes in any number of ways. It need not operate on the crude level of bribing individual voters. What is needed, then, are strictly enforced limits on the amount of money that can be spent on campaigning, and the demarcation of the arenas in which campaigning operates.

To enforce the stipulations of the code of ethics it is necessary that a committee be created, comprising representatives of the Ministry of Interior and the judiciary as well as party members and independent candidates. This committee would have the right to examine all campaign budgets, and would set the ceiling for such budgets.

An appropriate model for such a committee already exists. In the June 1993 elections to the Moroccan Chamber of Deputies the government, opposition, the Ministry of Interior and the judiciary came together within the framework of a national committee to formulate an electoral code. After the election, even the opposition appeared pleased with the results. What better recommendation could one ask?



Ahmed Thabit

This week's Soapbox speaker is a political science lecturer at Cairo University.

Survival of the fittest

As Saddam Hussein underscores his remarkable survival five years after the Gulf War with a presidential referendum, **Mustafa Kamel El-Sayed**, examines the unprecedented longevity of some of today's Arab regimes, and wonders what the future holds

The ability of contemporary Arab political regimes to survive is not much in doubt. The Arab world, after all, possesses more traditional monarchies than any other region in the world. Nor are such monarchies limited to the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council since they include both Jordan and Morocco, ruled by two of the longest surviving heads of state in the world.

Who could have imagined that Saddam Hussein would remain in power following his disastrous defeat after the annexation of Kuwait? Four years after his failed invasion, Saddam Hussein is still in power, despite the practical partition of his country by Western powers led by the US, and despite the recent defection of some of his closest collaborators and members of his own family.

Who could have expected Colonel Gadaffi to survive sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, again under the initiative of the US, supported in this instance by the governments of the UK and France? The Libyan people might find it difficult to get medicines and to travel conveniently to other countries, but there does not seem to be any threat to the survival of the "leader of the Libyan Revolution" as the Colonel is called in Libya.

Finally, democracy's so-called third wave, which has shaken the foundations of so many authoritarian and communist regimes in practically every region of the world, has singularly failed to topple a single Arab regime. On the contrary, an elected government was overthrown in Sudan while in Algeria the second round of elections, which would probably have been won by the opposition Islamic Salvation Front, were cancelled. Indeed, democracy's third wave has led, if anything, to more authoritarian methods of governing in many Arab countries.

The durability of political regimes is a new phenomenon in the Arab world, a region plagued by political instability since an Arab nation came into existence in the wake of the diffusion of the Islamic faith. None of the four Guided Caliphs survived long, and three of them were assassinated. Ibn Khaldoun, the Arab philosopher of history, formulated a theory about the circulation of elites according to which no dynasty could survive for more than three generations. (Ibn Khaldoun estimated the life of a generation as 33 years).

More recent, post-independence regimes have fared little better: led either by traditional oligarchies or an alliance of landowners and a rising bourgeoisie, they demonstrated little skill in containing the pressures of social change. They succumbed, in the 1950s, to the rise of the new middle class with its vanguard of the military and civilian technocrats or else they staggered on, as in Yemen, Sudan and Libya, only to be replaced in the 1960s by groups of free officers allied to radical members of the intelligentsia. The pattern, set by Egypt in 1952, was followed, with some variations in Syria, Iraq and Algeria.

Michael Hudson hints at the reasons that lie behind the staying power exhibited by Arab regimes since the 1970s when he identifies common features within those regimes, be they traditional monarchies, modernising monarchies or modernising republics. These countries have certainly spent a great deal on building-up and maintaining their repressive capacities by creating powerful security and military establishments capable of shielding them against any internal subversion. Following the advice of Machiavelli to his prince, they have also spent a great deal on the art of love by expanding the welfare services offered by their states. And finally they have all elaborated a legitimising ideology in terms of Arab nationalism, Arab socialism, or in the case of conservative regimes, a brand of traditional patriotism.

Such formulas found a conducive setting in the bi-polar international system. The radical republics received support from the Soviet Union, the conservative regimes were supported by the West. Throughout most of the 1970s, during the boom stimulated by the massive increase in oil prices in 1973, the international economy also encouraged the success of such formulations, both for oil exporting states and those that exported labour. From the mid-80s onwards, however, things began to change.

The oil glut in international markets led to a decrease in the price of oil and hence in the revenues of both the petroleum exporters and those countries dependent on the remittances of citizens working abroad. The situation was compounded by the collapse first of Eastern Europe and finally of the Soviet Union itself. It became difficult for Arab regimes to maintain welfare services at the levels their populations had come to expect. There was an attempt to implement structural adjustments which have so far failed to stimulate the long awaited "take-off".

The collapse of the socialist camp gave the US a free hand in dealing with Arab countries, contributing to the de-facto dismembering of Iraq and the continuing hardships imposed on the Libyan people. The entire population of two nations are thus forced to pay for the foreign and domestic policies of regimes over which they have no control. A new regional "rapport de force", and not a balance of power, started to take shape, with the non-Arab regional actors — Israel, Turkey and Iran — assuming the upper hand in deciding the political map of the Middle East.

Given these new international and regional realities, the legitimacy of Arab regimes began to be challenged as never before. They are viewed by their citizens as being incapable of accomplishing the most fundamental functions of a state. Their ability to defend either themselves or their citizens against foreign aggression has been called into question. Nor are they able to offer the welfare packages that would make life more tolerable. Standards of living, which have been badly affected by the international economy, have been further eroded by mismanagement of the domestic economy.

How do Arab states respond to these changing international, regional and domestic environments? Two possible strategies, in the light of recent experience, have shown themselves to be riddled with dangers for the survival of Arab ruling elites. The Algerian experience seems to have convinced Arab leaders that to move along the path of liberalisation, furthering the process of democratisation, is untenable. The ballot box can, Arab regimes have discovered, contain nasty surprises if fair elections are allowed to be held.

Thus Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan and Lebanon have all witnessed some retreat as their governments have moved towards the authoritarian end of the liberalisation continuum.

The second, failed strategy has been to seek to establish alliances with Islamist groups, an approach followed by Ga'afar Numeiri in Sudan before he was overthrown in a popular revolution in 1985, and one flirted with briefly in the wake of the first legislative elections in Jordan in 1990. The lesson Arab rulers drew from such experiences was simple: the Islamists are not going to accept to continue as a junior partner in the government, expected to ratify policies, particularly with respect to Israel, which run against their basic tenets. It is, however, risky to ignore completely the appeal of the Islamists among an increasingly frustrated population.

The cost of returning to the repressive policies associated with military regimes and the single-party states are probably, today, deemed too high. Thus, the familiar ploy has developed of pretending to uphold certain principles while rejecting them in practice. Opposition forces are then divided and misled, and Arab regimes gain time which, in these hard times is what they most desire.

Several keen observers of the Middle East scene seem to believe that despite the difficulties faced by Arab regimes, neither revolution nor democratisation seem likely in the near future. And indeed this does seem the most plausible scenario, not least because it accords best with the wishes of both major powers and non-Arab regional actors. They favour the present state of affairs in the region to the destabilisation that might well result from genuine democratisation or the seizure of power by Islamist groups in another Arab country.

But will the internal dynamics of Arab societies allow these regimes to continue? This is the question which no observer of the Middle East scene would venture to answer. The extraordinary changes effected in the world during the past decade make of any such predictions a hazardous game. Forecasting has become an impossible task, an activity which has nothing to do with scientific knowledge.

The writer is a professor of political science at Cairo University.

The politics of intolerance

At what point, asks **Kamal El-Menoufi**, did tolerance become more of a fiction than a fact in Arab society?

Among the self-evident truths in a democratic society is the freedom of its citizens to lawfully express their ideas in a pluralistic forum, unfettered by onerous restrictions imposed by the government and society.

Tolerance, as a social and cultural norm, is therefore, a condition for the maintenance and development of a viable democracy, while its weakness bodes ill for the process of democratisation. In today's Arab society, tolerance is steadily declining. Officials, weary of criticism, slander their opponents, and if necessary, resort to open repression. Public debates often degenerate into personal feuds, trivialising the very notion of pluralism in the public's eyes. Opposition parties, which advocate government tolerance, are more likely than not to curtail the freedom of expression of their own members. And once they gain power, that same party quickly clamps down on its opponents.

Name-calling has become a rampant feature of ideological and political debate. The labels have included: "opportunist", "hypocrite," "puppet", "defeatist", "agent", "communist", "fanatic". These epithets are especially free flowing during elections, where mud-slinging is the name of the game.

Groups adhering to political Islam, especially extremist groups, reject all other parties except the "party of God". But even within this party, multiplicity of interpretations is unacceptable, as this may cause a rift in the party. Only strict interpretation is acknowledged. Their one-sided view is biased, undermines reason, opposes creativity, fuels suspicion, apprehension and enmity. It is no secret that with their extremist views and practices, these groups violate the very essence of Islam and undermine its principles and values.

The divine sources of Islam, namely the Qur'an and the *sunna* (the sayings and tradition of the Prophet), recognise diversity as a fundamental principle. They advocate freedom of thought and expression, as well as moderation, tolerance and forgiveness.

And even among intellectuals, supposedly the pillars of tolerance and promoters of pluralism and diversity, intolerance runs amuck. While they are often the first to complain about the decline of democracy, ironically, they take criticism with the same degree of intolerance as everyone else. Moreover, their hallmark is to brand each other as either "true" or "pseudo" intellectuals according to their leanings. One group favours those who share their ideological slant, and are quick to stifle opposition. Another group are as quick to sell-out dissenting colleagues before official circles, without a second thought.

Teaching has become an exercise in rote memorisation, aided by the use of textbooks written by these self-same narcissistic, "infallible" professors, for whom criticism is taken as a personal insult. As such, ideas and opinions in our society are inseparable from their propagator. The ideas are assessed not on the basis of their merit, but on how their proponent is perceived by his peers.

The lack of tolerance which characterises our political and intellectual life and governs our social relations is a symptom of an ailing society. In short, intolerance is the product of a societal framework shaped by intertwined social, economic, political and cultural factors.

In most Arab countries, the state controls the economy and monopolises the nation's wealth and resources. Consequently, it holds the lives of its citizens in the balance and can shift that scale at random to sway popular opinion in its favour. Invariably, this means that some benefit at the expense of others. As a result, this breeds jealousy and animosity among the citizens and between the government and the people.

But the shift from a centrally planned economy to one embracing free market principles has prompted some changes. The expansion of the private sector and the releasing of market forces and mechanisms has furthered individual liberty and diversity, which I believe are invaluable in sowing the seeds of tolerance.

In social terms, Arab society is characterised by a wide gap between the rich and the poor, where wealth is distributed unevenly and only a small minority receives the lion's share of the income. This kind of social injustice is fertile ground for breeding dissatisfaction, hatred and suspicion. When supplemented by economic distortions, the ranks of the underprivileged swell, leaving them at the mercy of the rich.

Couple this less-than-equitable situation with the rise in prices, inflation, unemployment and inadequate social services, intolerance and aggression become likely outcomes, which take the form of underground movements and fanaticism. Additionally, with loyalty being defined along tribal, familial and factional lines, tolerance becomes a distant dream versus an attainable goal.

Moreover, in the realm of politics, most Arab regimes rarely take into account the will of the people. Accustomed to suppressing opposition, and in the absence of free and fair elections, a ruler retains control for life.

Admittedly, while certain Arab states are at varying points on the road to democracy, holding general elections for their representatives and municipal assemblies, the majority are still ruled by authoritarian regimes. Even those who adopted pluralistic systems have reverted to old ways, with the governments believing that they are never wrong. The opposition, however, will not be swayed from its convictions. The continuing intolerance of the main political actors stifles any effort to develop the kind of middle-of-the-road accommodations that are essential attributes of a stable democracy.

The situation is compounded by the patterns of child raising and socialisation. Whether part of a nuclear or extended family, a child is raised in a patriarchal environment where the young are dominated by the old, the women by the men. Intimidation leaves the margin of dialogue and reasoning narrow. Non-analytical teaching methods nurture a culture of passivity and submissiveness rather than one that favours freedom of thought and open discussion. The media, tends to speak "to" the public rather than "with" it. It is, for the most part, dedicated to regurgitating or hammering the regime's viewpoints, but rarely takes the trouble to look at an issue from the people's perspective.

Thus the structural distortions inherent in our societies today are primarily responsible for the weak manifestation of tolerance. For tolerance to become a concrete and effective value in our lives, we must quicken the pace along the path of democratisation, economic liberalisation and social justice. Improving our methods of teaching and reforming our media would render these institutions capable of disseminating the principles of democracy so that they become ingrained in the minds and hearts of the people.

The writer is professor of political science at Cairo University.

To The Editor

Fair Fayoum

Sir- As usual I enjoyed reading *Al-Ahram Weekly* the week before last, especially the supplement about tourism in Egypt. But, as a reader of this paper from issue number nine to 242, I have never read anything about my city — Fayoum. I wonder why it is unknown.

In Fayoum we have a lot to attract tourists. We have Islamic, Coptic and Pharaonic monuments. We have a very big natural lake which is near Cairo. We have cheap labour and a set of new and good roads which link the tourist sites with the whole of Egypt. Fayoum can be a crossroads for those who are coming from the north to the south and those from the east (the Red Sea) to the west (the oases).

Finally, the time it takes for a tourist in a bus to reach Fayoum from the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square is only twice the 50 minutes it takes to reach the pyramids.

Atef Abdel-Gawad Ali
English Teacher
Fayoum

Harmless nukes

Sir- Ashraf Saad's letter in the issue of *Al-Ahram Weekly* dated 5-11 October shows both naiveté and total belief in the slander and prevarication emanating from both Canberra and Wellington.

I particularly resent Mr Saad's assumption that "we" all oppose France's nuclear tests.

These tests are obviously necessary for the defence of Europe, especially when one looks at the number of those hell-bent on acquiring a destructive nuclear capability. I, for one, understand perfectly France's defensive will. What I do not trust, however, is Canberra's intentions in the Pacific and their incitement of those well-paid Greenpeace gangs.

Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating's own experts have clearly stated that these tests will have no significant effect on the region's ecology, so I suggest we should look for other reasons for Mr Keating's fomenting hatred.

Finally, Mr Saad's concern for the environment should begin closer to home where gas fumes and industrial waste are creating far more problems than a harmless experiment on the other side of the planet.

Habib Hawa
Managing editor
Search Egypt
Cairo

Poor little slave girl

Is there much sense behind three performances over five nights. **David Blake** questions the holy writ of *Aida*

Aida: Guiseppe Verdi; Cairo Opera Company; Cairo Opera Orchestra; Ivan Filev, conductor(18 & 19 Oct); Mustafa Nagui, conductor (22 Oct); Kouzmann Popov, director; Abdallah Saad, executive director; Erminia Kamel and Abdel-Moneim Kamel, choreography; Main Hall; Cairo Opera House, 18, 19 & 22 October

"Tell me, mother, of Aida's struggles."

"I can't dear, they are too complex for one as young as you."

In and around Memphis the traffic is always bad. But three *Aidas* in five days is a certain traffic jam. But new *Aida* french fries are on sale at the main entrance. *Aida* is all over Egypt. This is celebration time.

The prelude begins. The Cairo Opera Orchestra (COO) under Ivan Filev is sure to give something zesty, speedy and exciting. This it does. Whether the singers love it or not is another matter. This opera is, after all, an arduous four hour tramp.

What we actually watch on the stage is merely one small episode of incarceration at the finish of a scene of small domestic troubles in the high moment of the Egyptian empire. The pharaohs were fastidious. Anything unpleasant went underground in a trice.

This is a tale about two people's efforts to extinguish themselves and of an empire, all-powerful, that found them guilty of treason. Aida has nothing to do with the plot. She is no more than musical notes, beauteous ones admittedly. But beauty doesn't help her much as she is dragged along against her will, forever at the mercy of the egos of Rhadames and Amneris.

Rhadames's mistake was loving Aida. He should have ditched her and stuck to the empire. Amneris's love for Rhadames entangles her with the priests, always a messy business, and she pays the price.

Many producers, including Verdi, have toyed with the idea of cutting *Aida* but because of the public it has become holy writ and so stays as it is — long, lovely but wearisome. Its symphonic perfections keep it on the production line, annihilating all rivals. No longer an opera, it has become cybernetic and will end up in alternative space.

The silky soft prelude has finished and we move into a Memphis interior. There is nothing nostalgic about Aida. She has long since overtaken the pharaohs on the time bends and it is quite possible to set her in any age. Maserati jet-set or plain retro classic as in this production. Thanks to the direction of Abdallah Saad this is classy retro that avoids pantomime. The extensive stage of the theatre is used to provide poetic vistas of shadowy stone deities obliquely seen on the horizon. Highly charged happenings in confined spaces are suggested. Saad sets it mostly after sundown, a ploy which culminates in Act III, in the dead of night, with the suggestion that much trouble is brewing for the morrow. Very insinuating, very much what is suggested by the music. This is no operatic, chocolate box, palm tree laden landscape. The palms are there, retributive, doom-laden wrecks. There will be killing tonight, and the victim will be Aida unless she manages her infamous high Cs.

From the capture of Rhadames in Act III to the end, Saad manages to convey a majestic, spacious unease, alarmingly like — one supposes — the court of the Borgias. It is new, refreshing and as a production graces the Opera House.

Flashback to the opening scene. Abdallah Saad has made a visual spring off into a Pharaonic temple with empty pools of dark shadow, looming gods and the feeling of vast height. A man in sensible army clothes is singing the Celeste Aida. It is Hassan Kami and soon he will be in trouble with the police. He can't get his priorities right. Empire or Aida? He settles for Aida.

Kami comes in for a lot of nagging these days, mostly about the state of his voice. Sometimes it is deserved, but tonight he managed to more than get through. He showed how the part should be sung, even if he was a little short on tone to do it. The opening scene ends with the tenebrous entrance of Aida to face a spidery, suspicious Amneris.

This Aida — Rebecca Semrau — is 26 and from Los Angeles. She looks right and sounds more than right. She sounds marvelous. The young voice is a *spinta soprano*, still enjoying a spring delight in singing. She loves it and she knows how. She has no vocal holes or shrieks. She is a professional and it is a pleasure to listen to her. The *ritorna vincitor* is done with love and irony and she ends it on a sad, high sigh of terror.

The character of Amneris is like an open fuse: if you come near her she shocks. Awatef El-Sharkawi as Amneris, jealous of Aida, has a ghostly voice but tries hard at the character. Their quarrel over Rhadames goes well and precedes one of the big public crowd gatherings of Aida. War is coming. The messenger from the south — a lovely though small part well-sung by Tamer Tawfik — ominously announces details of the threatening advance on Egyptian territory by Amonasro, Aida's father. Shivers from Aida — it's her dad. And with Semrau using her free flowing top the result was exciting.

The first act, then, saw the opera on course, no matter the quibbles, for a strong run. This is nice in any *Aida* production, given that there is so much of the opera.

So far, the ballet choreography by Erminia and Abel-Moneim Kamel has been good, straightforward stuff. No effort at ethnic eurythmics. Classical ballet comes in the scenes with the male dancers who have, mercifully, taken over from the oh-so-cute children that featured in earlier productions.

Throughout the three performances Reda El-Wakil's singing as the high priest is richly dark and impressive, though there is no real effort to dramatically underline the fact that he is, rather more than the power behind the throne, the throne itself. The characters in the story are all at his mercy.

Aida, Act II — a salutary reminder that we are only half-way through. Thanks to the line the production takes, *Aida* fatigue has so far been avoided. The pharaoh himself, Claude Rathle, like his daughter in this production, is short on tone.

The army is effective. Every effort is being made to speed things along. Kami, Semrau and the rest do well in the big pre-marriage embarrassments as Rhadames prepares to slip out of the conjugal net Amneris has set for him.

Act III, the reef which often sinks the whole operatic machine, is this time negotiated without mishap. Aida, with Semrau on the first night of its performance, passed the test, even producing a perfect, unhurried obligatory high C. She was the best of the three.

Act IV looked impressive — shadows and pools of light. Amneris here took the plunge. She made a grand effort and came up with some tone but nothing satisfying. A true Amneris can steal the show. This one did not but she was brave. From here on to the burial of the two lost souls, the production and the cast on the first night gave the best they had. El-Wakil and the boys from the Temple of Doom got their bass line with sonority. Kami, whatever tone failures, is generally effective in the last act. He is honest to Verdi's tempo and the words come clear and sweet. Aida showed her controlled top, floated and musical. Semrau never opted for the pathetic. Her Aida was brave to the end.

Aida Marathon. Night Two. Some cast changes.

This time round we have new principals — Aida is Marie-Elena Giorgioadami and Rhadames is Constantin Nica.

Amneris is Zlatimira Nicolova, the Bulgarian mezzo. Tall, serpentine with large volumes of contralto sound. She knows her part, looks like a Renaissance pope on the attack, dangerously vindictive and fast-moving, towers over everyone, ready on a word to strike like a flying golden cobra. Some daughter. Fortunately tonight's pharoah is Abdel-Wahab El-Sayed — dark, toney and commanding — having come up through the household cavalry. Father and daughter make a nasty, well-voiced team.

The Cairo Opera Orchestra here began its odyssey in grand style. Night one was patchy; night two consistently interesting, completed at a flying pace under Filev. Aida may be a long hot run, but Filev never flags.

Abdallah Saad has made changes to the first night's production. Tonight he has invented even more space and things look darker and more menacing. Gihan El-Nasser is a good priestess and we are spared the first night's long waits between acts. The machinery is moving.

Amneris too moves as the opera proceeds. It is going to be her night. Aida Marie-Elena lacks vocal power so very soon she is merely the victim in Amneris's trap. She is delivered in the end on the altar, dead beat. But we have much mileage yet to cover. Amneris is into all the action. She dominates the crowd scenes. Aida, in spite of the pale voice, managed to get a bit of Nubian colour into her third act and sang rather than screamed all the notes. Her father, James Hooper, chucked her around passionately. Amneris made minced meat of the Amonasro family.

Things looked pitch dark as we moved into Act IV and the incarceration. Amneris had taken the audience firmly in hand as well as the priests. She gave the latter hell. But they stood their ground and Amneris, who would be called "the temporal" in a Verdian encounter, was defeated by the "spiritual". Verdi's heart was always firmly with the one who stands against the establishment.

Amneris was the establishment but defied it. It is this conflict that tears her to pieces. Amneris, in Nicolova's performance, rose heroically to the tragic conclusions. She stood tall, lived proud, dark, overpowered but unbowed at the end, like the dark angel of the annunciation. Death was the only escape possible for her.

Night Three.

As this show began there was one question. What had happened to the wonderful Amneris? What horrid fate did the doom boys cook up for her? It will be hard to do without the height, the swoop and the Medusa stare of Nicolova.

All the height in this concluding version belonged to Iman Mustafa as Aida. She looks very much the classic character, tall, stealthy even, yet dignified. She was the new material in a group beginning to show their battle-scars. Rhadames: Kami slogs on, brave and caring about stage business. He can still produce the correct emotions, but on the last night no longer any tone. King: Abdel-Wahab El-Sayed. Amonasro: Gaber El-Beltagui, always there and on the note.

And Iman Mustafa as Aida? She does great things at times. She's so young and dramatic. Maybe one day her prince will come and she'll be a great empress in *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*.

The action of *Aida* goes on as always and forever. The plot's the same, but the voices are faltering. Do we have feelings left for any of these creatures? So well-known, will these operatic dinosaurs ever disappear? There are sighs — at least with these three shows we are done with *Aida* for another year and a half. Careful, before you can say *Rigoletto*, Aida will be back. But now Verdi has left us to have the remnants of a night's sleep.

Top, Hassan Kami as Rhadames; left, Iman Mustafa and, right, Rebecca Semrau — with Gaber El-Beltagui as her father — in the title role

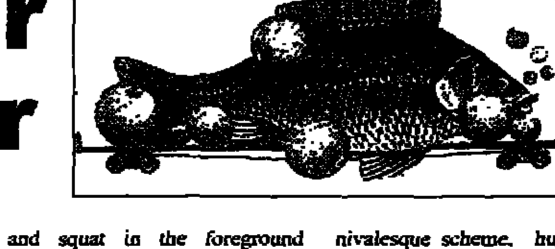


photos: Sherif Sonbol

Art

Gigantic apples; floating fish; a sea that hovers over the mountain peaks. **Marie-Therese Abdel-Messih** steps into Gonzalo Endara Crow's mythical spaces

Colour power



From where to look? We wonder as we gaze on Ecuadorian art for the first time in Cairo. From where to look — knowing that Latin-American post colonial culture has questioned Eurocentred master narratives? From where to look at an artist who has determinedly abandoned a 'universal' aesthetics?

In a local landscape where colour springs from volcanos, and where a snowcapped volcano, the Cotopaxi, represents a protective divinity, colour will be viewed as a source of power. It will, almost inevitably, be suffused with a rich symbolic content.

Endara's academic foray in Andean myth is reflected in his painterly manipulation of space. According to Andean myth, history advances in circles. At certain times the world can become chaotic and darkness prevails. But there is always a possibility for colour to recuperate the world's significance. From the perspective of an aesthetic translation of such a mythology, the recuperative power of colour is attained once the artist/viewer is reconciled to its natural language. Unlike in 'realistic' European painting where light plays a dominant role, light in Endara's painting is only present in colour. This 'naturalises' quick shifts from nocturnal to diurnal which do not signify a contrast in, but rather, a variety of temporal moods. Unlike classical European painting which is rigidly circumscribed by set time, in Endara's landscapes all tenses are present — they combine night and day, past and present, ethnicity and modernity, the open space and the crowded village.

The village of Merced, where Endara lives and which is the subject of his paintings, codifies a search for identity within traditional concepts and a desire for emancipation from the confinement of restricting principles. Merced is not simply a touristic site, a place with features to be registered. For Endara, it is a space through which he articulates a subjective experience of closeness and alienation, joy and fear, motion and stability, expansiveness and fragmentation — all part and parcel of the anxiety that prevails in mythical epochs of chaos and darkness and that pervades the world of contemporary Merced as Endara paints it.

The landscape is ambivalent — not simply meant to express the Latin American divide between an obsession with indigenous ethnicity and unconditioned surrender to a universalising discourse. In his landscapes, Endara attempts to create a non-hierarchical space in which all elements are simultaneously strange and familiar, alien and homely. As is the case in most of his paintings, in *That Which is Often Mentioned* the provincial tiled houses are small and squat in the foreground while gigantic mountains rise in the background. An emblem of modernity, the train crossing the mountains, transporting fish from the coastal regions to the centre and thus providing daily bread for the majority, becomes in the painting a sign of regeneration, of religious power. The contemporary Andean imagination, not different from the ancestral, attributes metaphysical power to all sources of life; the Andean reformulates his myths from everyday events — likewise, Endara. Industry has not de-territorialised his imaginative power, but rather, industry has been re-territorialised within his imagination. Industry and imagination in Endara's landscapes do not exist in binary opposition but in a state of complementarity.

The complementarity of humans and other creatures is emphasised through a reversal of natural relations of scale and through pictorial inversions. Humans are dwarfed by birds, animals and fruits (*That Which is Often Mentioned*). In most cases the human figure is two dimensional while other beings are presented in three dimensional perspectives. In this carnivalesque scheme, human activity is marginalised while flora and fauna are centralised; Endara puts into question the roles of captor and captive, consumer and consumed. In *Lent*, for example, a group of men are entrapped in the process of untrapping a huge fish. In *And Thus They Appeared*, human figures try to bind gigantic apples, intimating female sensuality, onto a truck. But the fruit in its colossal proportions only reveals how men are captive to their sensual desires. Flora and fauna/human reversals in scale; so too reversals in female/male power relations

The fact that human presence is marginalised does not mean that power is absent from the landscape. Although the human figure is neutralised, other elements of the landscape are empowered. The seemingly passive squatting houses surrendering to nightfall resist the darkness by infusing warmth and light through the windows. The colossal mountains rise defiantly. Feminine principles (nature) and masculine principles (buildings) are not set as binary opposites struggling for power but as a symbiotic pairs.

Power relations are redefined by the dislocation of the centre of gravity. If the colonial vision — with its rigid (mainly profit-oriented) concepts of time and space — invested the Andean landscape to its own interest, Endara reverses planes in order to dislocate the centre of gravity: things that should not float float in the sky; the sea hovers over the mountain peaks. In *After The Deluge* the houses seem to be sinking into a void while the train proceeds in a straight course above the roofs. The downward pull of the mass of houses is restrained by the two-dimensional pattern of the locomotive in horizontal direction. The tension between vertical and horizontal is relieved by the contrasts in the colour of the houses, their geometric and decorative character and the variety in the space intervals between the different houses. The relationship between the distant locomotive and the houses is maintained through the repetition and distribution of the orange colours.

Volume relationships in Endara's landscapes are always defined in terms of colour. His inversion of the law of gravity through colour modulation has allowed him to dislocate the position and significance of the rainbow. In *They Bring Forth Happiness*, *Ours* and *After the Night*, his rainbows are earth based and bespeak the language of their surroundings. They maintain an equilibrium between the celestial and the terrestrial. Their dislocation confirms the fact that even the rainbow is not universal as long as it springs from local soil to loom in an open sky.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Jemila Yosri
Community Services Association, 4 Rd 21, Maadi. Tel 350 5284. Sun-Wed, 9am-9pm & Thur 9am-5pm. Until 27 Oct.
Watercolours, pastels and oils which humorously portray the lives and surroundings of Egyptian workers.

Joaquina Casas
Spanish Cultural Centre, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746/337 1962. Daily exc Sun, 10am-8pm. Until 27 Oct.
Desert landscapes with women at work.

Gonzalo Endara Crow
Round Gallery of the Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily 9am-1pm & 3pm-8.30pm. Until 29 Oct.
Colourful myth-inspired paintings by the Ecuadorian artist.

Sayed Abdel-Rassoul and Group Exhibition
Salama Gallery, 36 Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-10pm. Until 30 Oct
Thirty paintings by Abdel-Rassoul commemorating him 40 years after his death. Also on display are collages, paintings and batiks by Ali Dessouki, Sawsan Amer and Sherif Reda.

Video Visions Cairo
Al-Hanager Arts Centre, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-10pm, Until 30 Oct.
Group show of installations and video works.

Leila Izzet (Paintings)
Al-Patio Gallery, 4 Rd 77G, Golf Area, Maadi. Tel 351 6643. Daily exc Sun, 10am-7pm. Until 31 Oct.

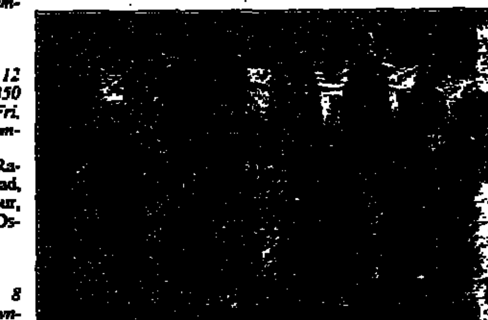
Passage to Eternity
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, American University in Cairo, corner of Al-Sheikh Rihan and Mansour Sts. Tel 357 3874. Until 31 Oct.
Exhibition on Egyptian funerary customs shown in books and photos.

Safeyya Mo'in
Ewart Gallery, American University in Cairo, Al-Sheikh Rihan St, Tahrir Sq. Tel 357 5422/3/4. Daily exc Fri 8am-5pm. Until 31 Oct.
Oil paintings of Egyptian landscapes.

Youth Salon
Arts Centre, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 31 Oct.

Group Exhibition
Al-Shomou' Gallery, 12 Rd 150, Maadi. Tel 350 0081. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5pm-8.30pm. Until 2 Nov.
Salah Taher, Sabri Ragheb, Hoda Mourad, Mohamed Mandour, Gazbeiya Serri and Ossama Mohamed.

Mohamed Abla
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 778 623. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 2 Nov.
Sculptures constructed from found objects and paintings.



Gallery Salama

Brian Kwame and Maher Ali
Community Services Association, 4 Road 21, Maadi. Tel 350 5284/376 8232. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-9pm, Thur 9am-5pm. 30 Oct-3 Nov.
African folkloric themes in Kwame's paintings, Delta village life in Ali's.

Gamal El-Sagini
Extra, 3 Al-Nessim St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 4 Nov.

Omar El-Fayoumi
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 7 Nov.
Icon-inspired paintings.

Hungarian Roots of Photography
Sony Gallery, American University in Cairo, Al-Sheikh Rihan St, Tahrir Sq. Tel 357 5422/3/4. Daily exc Fri 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 9 Nov.
Photos from the the Hungarian National Museum of Photography.

Mari e Deserti D'Egitto (Seas and Deserts of Egypt)
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily exc Fri, 10am - 1pm & 5pm-8pm. On for at least a week.
Photographs by Vitaliano Napoleone and Gherardo La Francesca.

Nazli Madkour
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Until 12 Nov.
Landscapes and figure studies.

Adly Rizkallah
Centre of Arts, 2 Al-Maahad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 6pm-10pm. Until 13 Nov.
Watercolours and sculptures.

FILMS

Cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.

The Yellow Handkerchief
Japanese Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr Al-Aini St, Garden City. Tel 355 3962/3/4. 26 Oct, 6pm. Arabic subtitles.
Directed by Yoji Yamada (1977).

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8723.
La Voce Della Luna (The Voice of the Moon)
Directed by Fellini (1989) and starring Paolo Villaggio, the film is the last of the Fellini series at the centre. *29 Oct, 7pm.*
Pane, Amore E Fantasia (Bread, Love and Fantasy)
Directed by Luigi Comencini (1953) and starring Vittorio De Sica. *30 Oct, 7pm.*
La Donna Più Bella Del Mondo (The Most Beautiful Woman in the World)
Directed by Robert Leonard (1955) and starring Vittorio Gassman. *31 Oct, 7pm.*
The last two films are dedicated to Italian actress Gina Lollobrigida.

Spanish Films
Spanish Cultural Centre, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746/337 1962.
El Viaje A Nhigana Parte (The Voyage to Nowhere)
Directed by Fernando Fernán Gómez (1986). *30 Oct, 7.30pm.*
El Mar y El Tiempo (The Sea and The Weather)
Directed by Fernando Fernán Gómez (1989). *31 Oct, 7.30pm.*

A Week of French Films
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil. Tel 574 7435. English and Arabic subtitles.
Les Amants du Pont-Neuf (The Lovers of Pont-Neuf)
Directed by Leos Carax (1991) and starring Juliette Binoche, Denis Lavant and Klaus Michael Gruber. The story of the terrible and hallucinatory love affair between a fire-eater and a funny match on the oldest Parisian bridge. *26 Oct, 6.30pm & 9pm; 29 Oct, 9pm.*
Noce Blanche (White Wedding)
Directed by Jean-Claude Brisseau (1989) and starring Vanessa Paradis, Bruno Cremer and Ludmilla Mikael. François Hainaut, a philosophy professor, is interested in a female student who is under threat of expulsion from university. She seduces him and becomes his lover. *27 Oct, 6.30pm & 9pm.*
Tous Les Matins du Monde (All The Mornings of the World)
Directed by Alain Corneau (1991) and starring Gerard and Guillaume Depardieu, Jean-Pierre Marielle and Anne Brochet. A beautiful and austere evocation of St Colombe's life. *28 Oct, 6.30pm & 9pm.*
Mon Père Ce Hero (My Father This Hero)
Directed by Gerard Lauzier (1991) and starring Gerard Depardieu, Marie Gillain, Catherine Jacob and Patrick Mille. Veronique spends the summer with her father. In order to arouse the jealousy of the trainer whom she loves, she pretends her father is her lover. *29 Oct, 6.30pm.*

Dumb and Dumber
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Amityville 3-D
Rivoli II, 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.
Wear the glasses and experience horror in 3-D.

Shining Through & Eshr Al-Bondok (Hazelnut Shells)
Normandy (outdoor), 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 7pm.

Outbreak
Cairo Sheraton, Galaa St. Tel 360 6081/ 348 8600/700. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
Starring Dustin Hoffman, Rene Russo, and Donald Sutherland.

Stargate
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Starring Kurt Russel and James Spader.

The Pagemaster
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & midnight.
With McCauley Culkin.

Disclosure
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm.
Starring Michael Douglas and Demi Moore.

Interview With The Vampire
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Starring Tom Cruise, Antonio Banderas and Brad Pitt.

Congo
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Where you are the endangered species.

The Drunken Master
Rivoli I, 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.

Al-Mala'eka La Taskun Al-Ard (Angels Don't Live On The Earth)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Starring Mamdouh Abdel-Alim and Pousy.

Emra'a Hazzat 'Arsh Misr (The Woman Who Shook Egypt's Throne)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 3656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.
Starring Nadia El-Guindi, Farouk El-Fishawi and Mahmoud Hemeida in a film directed by Nader Galal.

Atabet Al-Settat (The Women's Threshold)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Starring Nabila Ebeid and Safeya El-Emari.

Toyour Al-Zalam (Birds of the Dark)
Diana Palace, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Starring Adel Imam, Youssra and Gamil Rateb and directed by Sherif Arafa.

Al-Hob Gonoun Fil-Seif (Love is Madness in Summer)
Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.

MUSIC

Mainzerhof
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0601/0603. 27 Oct, 8pm.
A German choir performs.

Drum Recital
Al-Hanager Arts Centre, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 27 Oct, 8pm.
Ahmed Rabie' on the drums.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0601/0603. 28 Oct, 8pm.
Works by Takemitsu, Beethoven and Mahler. Piano soloist Ramzy Yassa and conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi.

Egyptian Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 29 Oct, 8pm.

Festival Concerts
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 1 Nov, 8pm.
During the inauguration of the Arabic Music Festival, the Cairo Symphony Orchestra and the Cairo Opera Choir and Soloists perform Tawfik El-Basha's The Prophetic Song. Choir master Aldo Magnato and conductor Mustafa Nagui.

DANCE

Panta Rhei
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 26 Oct, 8pm.
Swiss ballet company Movers perform.

THEATRE

Dastoor Ya Siadna (With Your Permission, Masters)
Al-Fann, Ramses St. Tel 578 2444. Daily 9.30pm exc Mon
A man pays dearly for deciding to run against the president in the elections.

Haze Nawa'em (Nawa'em's Luck)
Al-Houssaper, 16 Al-Ter'a Al-Boulaqeya St. Tel 769 233. Daily 10pm, exc Tues
Directed by Raziq El-Bahnassawoui, starring Dalal Abdel-Aziz, Mahmoud El-Guindi and So'ad Nasr.

Al-Za'im (The Leader)
Al-Haram, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily exc Tues, 10pm. Mon & Fri 8pm.
Starring Adel Imam.

Al-Gamila wal Wehshin (The Beautiful and the Ugly)
Al-Zamalek, 13 Shagaret Al-Dor, Zamalek. Tel 341 0660. Daily 10.30pm. exc Fri 8.30pm.
Starring Laila Elwi as the *gamila* and everyone else as the *wehshin*.

Mama America
Qasr Al-Nil, Qasr Al-Nil St, Tahrir. Tel 575 0761. Daily exc Tues, 10pm. Mon 8pm.
With Mohamed Sobhi, director and lead actor, in a socio-political allegory written by Mahdi Youssef.

Lealy
Balloon, Corniche Al-Nil, Agouza. Tel 347 1718. Daily exc Tues. 9pm.
Musical starring Fayza Kamal, Mohamed El-Helw and Mohamed Nouh.

Ya Nas Efhamou (Try to Understand, People)
Floating Theatre, Fatma Rushdi St. Tel 363 8783. Daily 9.30pm.
Starring Emad Rashad, Dina Abdallah and Hassan Kami.

Ra's Al-Dieuk (Cockerel Dances)
Miami, Talaat Harb St. Tel 767 086. Daily 10pm, exc Tues.
Starring Nagah El-Mougi with Mohamed Abul-Hassan and Aida Riad.

Bahloul fi Istambul (Bahloul in Istanbul)
Hilton Ramsis, Corniche Al-Nil. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm, Sun 8pm.
Samir Ghanem stars with Elham Shahine in yet another comedy.

La...Balash Keda (None of That)
Al-Rihani, Emadeddin. Tel 591 3697. Daily exc Wed 10pm. Tues 8.30pm
Starring Poussi, Mamdouh Abdel-Alim and Hanan El-Torki.

Hazzemni Ya...
Al-Gezira, Abdel-Aziz Al-Seoud, Manial. Tel 364 4160. Daily 10pm, Fri 8pm.
A musical involving extensive belly-dancing by Fifi Abdou. Also starring Medhat Saleh and Sherif Mounir.

National Circus
Next to Balloon Theatre, Al-Nil St, Corniche Al-Nil, Al-Agouza. Tel 347 0612. Daily, exc Wed, 9pm.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by ***Injy El-Kashef***

Around the galleries



Hazem Abdel-Khaliq

SCULPTURES in bronze and wood, paintings, ceramics and brass engravings by the late **Gamal El-Segeini** are on exhibit at **Extra Gallery**. Constant through this wide variety of media and through multiple sources of inspiration— Pharaonic, Islamic, folkloric — is a tension between the abstract/geometrical and the figurative.

Use of unusual materials and a wide range of styles characterise the sculpture section of the **7th Youth Salon** at the **Centre of Arts, Zamalek**. Among a great many interesting items several are of particular note, including Hazem Abdel-Khaliq's prize-winning totemic five part piece which foregrounds the fact that sculpture is wrought from nature — in this case wood decorated with sea shells.

Reviewed by ***Nagwa El-Ashri***



Notes in the margin

Hala Halim examines the life and work of Abkar Al-Saqqaf

The salon of the small villa in Hadra, Alexandria, where artist Dea Al-Saqqaf lives, gives pride of place to a statue of Dea's sister, the writer Abkar Al-Saqqaf (b. 24 January, 1913 - d. 1 November, 1990). One among several statues and portraits she made of her sister, this one shows the author seated, head turned skyward, pen in hand, a few lines of a poem already jotted on a sheet of paper propped on three tomes. In the mid-1940s, when the statue was made, Abkar had already launched her project to write a three-volume book *Na'hw Aafaq Awsa', Al-'Aql Al-Insani fi Marahllihi Al-Tatawuria* ("Towards Broader Horizons; The Human Mind in its Evolutionary Stages").

The engraved verses encapsulate her credo: "What is life? And how did 'life' come into being?/What is existence? How did existence come into being?/What is religion? No! Let the question be: what is the history of mankind, the soul of mankind, the mind of man". The lines were to appear, slightly modified, in the preface to the first volume of "Towards Broader Horizons". Written over more than a decade, the work — an analysis of the evolution of religious thought through a comparative study of world religions — was Abkar's life project. The first two volumes were published in 1962 by the Anglo-Egyptian Press, with the third scheduled to follow soon after. Within a month, however, the two volumes were banned by Al-Azhar and withdrawn from the market (prior to publication, they had passed only state censorship). The third volume remains unpublished to this day.

From the few surviving copies, the encyclopaedic scale of the work can be gauged. Volume I charts the religious impulse from its earliest manifestations: ancient Egyptian, Chaldean, Hebrew, Indian, Chinese, Persian and ancient Greek. Volume II traces the development of religious and philosophical thought in Hellenistic and Roman times, reviews the origins and development of Christianity and investigates the creeds of the Arabian Peninsula before and after Islam. Volume III, from the descriptive table of contents (included in the first volume), follows the development of Christian and Islamic thought up to modern times, pairing their varieties against rational and philosophical thought, and bringing to bear upon the two religions the concepts of modern science.

The vast compendium of knowledge in the three volumes represents a biography of the soul and reflects the multiplicity of the seemingly paradoxical influences that went into the making of the author. Abkar was born into the Saqqaf clan, descendants of Al-Hussein, the Prophet's grandson, and widespread in Arab and Asian countries as far apart as Jordan and Singapore. One Egyptian branch of the Saqqaf clan goes back to the Sufi Sidi Al-'Aidarous Mustafa Abdel-Rahman Al-Saqqaf (mentor of Al-Jabbarti), whose *maqam* is near the Mosque of Al-Sayeda Zeinab in Cairo.

Abkar's father, Mohamed Al-Saqqaf, was from Hadramawt, Yemen. Mohamed Al-Saqqaf worked as chief treasurer in Mecca (a post equivalent to that of minister of finance), in the reign of Al-Sharif Hussein. On one of his trips he met and married Abkar's mother, a Turkish woman, Aziza, daughter of a tobacco merchant. He settled for a life commuting between the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt, where his wife and children had taken up residence in a Heliopolis villa.

The extent of Abkar's formal education, as chosen by her father, was her schooling at the Sacré Coeur, in Cairo. The death of her husband, three months after their marriage, left her shaken to the core and prompted, speculates her sister, the beginning of her philosophical enquiry.

The sisters were then living with their widowed mother — their father had died in Yemen — in the Alexandrian suburb, Domaine de Siouf, in a small villa called Les Jasmins. It was at this time that Abkar and her sister started re-reading the holy books, poring over the few reference works that remained from their father's library, among them Mohamed Abdou's *Al-Imam wa Al-Siyasa* ("The Imam and Politics") and Ibn Hisham's biography of the Prophet Mohamed. Abkar also started on what can be described as a rough copy of her later works, a book on God which, her sister reports, she tore up once completed.

On a shelf of their own in Dea's library are the formative books read in those years. They include Maspero's *New Light on Ancient Egypt*, Breasted's two-volume *Histoire de L'Egypte*, Arthur Eddington's *The Nature of the Physical World*. These, like all the sisters' books, are like a palimpsest, carrying in their margins jottings in a code evolved by the sisters. Title pages invariably carry the date of acquisition, its source, and a personal note about the day. In the margins of the text, a leafy branch denotes approval; an exclamation mark alarm. The occasional, strident "No!" is followed by a tirade. Often the commentary is in Dea's hand, Dea who played multiple roles in her sister's life: Abkar's correspondent on scientific issues (given her interest in astronomy and modern physics), editor and literary executrix, and as her mediator with the world.

After the banning of "Towards Broader Horizons", Abkar started writing *Israel Wa Aqidat Al-Ard Al-Maw'ouda* ("Israel and the Doctrine of the Promised Land"), commissioned by the literary committee of the Ministry of Culture, then headed by Abbas El-Aqqad. Published in 1967, the book drew on her previous research in comparative religion and on her readings in anthropology and, above all, archaeology. It attempts to deconstruct the tenets of Zionism through an analysis of the discrepancies in the Torah, also providing evidence that Jerusalem predates the Israelites and that Israel was but a nomadic tribe that occupied the land. An English version of the book, *The Promised Land: Problem of the Middle East*, was never published.

At her death, most of Abkar's output remained in manuscript form. The difficulty of getting published was compounded by her financial inability to publish at her own expense. In addition to "Towards Broader Horizons", a draft of a treatise on language and a collection of poetry entitled *Al-Layl wa Al-Qalam* ("The Night and the Pen"), there are notes towards a book on the Prophet Mohamed as well as notes towards a book on Christ. The other major, coherent work that remained unpublished at her death was on the great Sufi Al-Hallaj, crucified as a heretic. It was through the tireless efforts of Dea, however, that Dar Ramattan undertook to publish the volume. Two months ago, five years after the author's death, *Al-Hallaj Aw Sawt Al-Damir* ("Al-Hallaj or the Voice of Conscience") became available in print. Dea is also currently negotiating reprinting the three volumes of "Towards Broader Horizons". Although Abkar had half-heartedly essayed, after the ban, an abridged, obviously more orthodox, version of the work, the three volumes are to appear in their entirety.

Abkar did not live to see the new wave of "the discourse of enlightenment", with several journals and publishing houses, both national and private, championing secularist, controversial works and reprinting previously banned texts. But with the turning of a more congenial tide, Abkar's work will surely resurface from the footnotes of the few who find it in them to credit her, and come into its own.





Inset, Abkar Al-Saqqaf and, above, Al-Saqqaf with Abbas El-Aqqad, celebrating his birthday

Plain Talk

Some weeks ago, I wrote about the inadequate approach to teaching history in Egyptian schools. It seems that in Britain also there is a similar concern regarding what some British thinkers call "the betrayal of British history".

Dr Tate, the chief executive of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority claims that, in the teaching of history from primary school to Oxford University, "knowledge is being sidelined, narrative neglected, heroes debunked and nationalism regarded with distaste". According to him, pupils are made to feel distanced from the events studied and are "denied the ability to form any concept of nationhood... Schools are abandoning what ought to be their prime purpose: the transmission of inherited culture".

It seems that in England as in Egypt, history textbooks in the past used to present a chronological survey of key developments in a vivid narrative which impressed upon its readers the fact that they were learning about significant and momentous events. This unfortunately is not the case with the history textbooks used today.

Over 30 years ago Bertrand Russell posed in a lecture the question "is history a science or an art?" In his lecture Russell explained what history can or should do for the general reader. History to him is "an essential part of the furniture of an educated mind". History books, he claimed, should not only present a set of historical facts, but should also read as pleasurably as a good novel. The writer of history textbooks thus needs literary skills, not least of all the ability to present historical facts in a style that can be easily enjoyed by pupils. It is imperative, however, that he should not distort facts — an all too common failing in Egyptian history books.

According to Russell history is not concerned only with large scale pageants. It is concerned also, and equally, with individuals. Dr Tate laments the fact that in contemporary English textbooks there seems to be no respect accorded to heroes of British history. According to Tate, school children seem to have lost pride in such figures as "Florence Nightingale, Lord Nelson and Alfred the Great, and look instead to pop stars and television characters as role models".

Tate also criticises the fact that university students are allowed to choose for themselves which subjects to study, and in many cases do not select history. This, in his opinion, creates graduates who know little about the nation's history. In response to this criticism, the *Daily Telegraph* has organised a competition in which readers were invited to submit their own 50-word definition of "what it is to be English?" — the prize, appropriately being a copy of G M Trevelyan's *English Social History*.

One hopes to see in Egypt similar debates and campaigns focused on the study of history. A new awareness of the importance of history might then be born. Nor should we underestimate the importance of such debates. The past is to be carefully guarded. It must, in all objectivity, be cherished, for good and bad. To learn the lessons of history we must first look that history in the face, without brushing those bits we find unpalatable under the carpet.

Mursi Saad El-Din

The speed of light

Al-Hallaj Aw Sawt Al-Damir (Al-Hallaj or the Voice of Conscience), Abkar Al-Saqqaf, Cairo: Dar Ramattan, 1995

The trial of Al-Hallaj — arrested in 913 and crucified in 922 — occupied almost a decade. Abkar Al-Saqqaf presents a dramatic portrait of this period, with all its attendant conflicts.

The charges of apostasy brought against Al-Hallaj were based on his advocacy of mystical union with God and self-annihilation in Him. However, in the first trial Ibn Sarij, the most prominent of the judges, having asserted Al-Hallaj's competence in exegesis, Qur'anic studies and *hadith* (the prophet's sayings), reported that since Al-Hallaj spoke in tongues he could not interpret during his mystic ecstasies, he was in no position to return a judgment of apostasy. Ibn Sarij concluded his judgment with a telling statement — he insisted that the words of Al-Hallaj, his Sufism and intellectual doctrine, fell outside the jurisdiction of the courts.

After the first trial Al-Hallaj was moved from the public jail to the house of a disciple where, in conditions that amounted to house arrest, he was supposed to devote his time to writing. Unfortunately the plot to discredit Al-Hallaj through charges of apostasy had its roots in politics. Al-Hallaj, who had pitted himself against injustice, oppression and corruption, was a supporter of the Karmathians, whose revolutionary social ideas were then threatening the Caliphate. The conspiracy against Al-Hallaj eventually triumphed, and he was executed. The book in hand is a biography of the intellect, politics and spirituality of Al-Hallaj, charting his stormy itinerary, from birth to blood drenched crucifixion.

Al-Hallaj, a political thinker who sought to establish a kingdom of justice and spirituality, was born in the Persian province of Khosakhstan. His tutors were Shi'ites and Sufis who professed knowledge of the hidden meanings of the revealed texts, and who were known for the austerity of their lives.

The name of Al-Hallaj became associated with two anti-Abbassid political movements. One, the revolution of the *Zinj* — slaves who rebelled against the injustices of land owners and who led a mutiny against the state — succeeding in overtaking a number of cities in the years between 869 and 883. Al-Hallaj was arrested and charged with supporting the *Zinj*. The second political movement, led by the Karmatians, was in many ways an extension of the first. And it was his association with the Karmathians that was ultimately to lead to Al-Hallaj's death.

Such popular movements, lacking the objective conditions for victory, abounded in utopian intellectual elements and were steeped in idealistic notions. Mohamed Ibn Karmiti, the spearhead of the movement, was conversant with Greek philosophy and a follower of Gnosticism, the link between Christian theology, the religions of the ancient East and neo-Platonism.

The philosophical sources of Al-Hallaj's mysticism, then, spoke of a supreme, divine being and the material world that contained emanations of that being. Certain individuals could receive a spark of this divine spiritual substance. They could, therefore, attain "gnosis", or revealed knowledge, and thus rescue the divine substance from the material environment. These emanations led to perfect man — the Prophet Mohamed, the word of God and the light of God.

Despite the influence of Greek philosophical trends and Christian and Bhuddist monasticism on Islamic mysticism the point of departure for Al-Hallaj's mysticism, indeed for Islamic mysticism in general, as Abkar Al-Saqqaf rightly maintains, was an Arab-Islamic reaction to internal crises in the first and second centuries AH.

The word Sufism derives from a proper noun, *Al-Sufa*, referring to the people who, in pre-Islamic times, lived around the Ka'ba and undertook matters pertaining to worship before such offices were taken over by the Qureish. The word eventually came to signify a lifestyle of asceticism and the word Sufism came to be associated with purity, trust in God and the desire to reach two emotional states, ecstasy and love.

Sufism acquired a pantheistic character advocating the oneness of the universe in God, and contending that the world is but an emanation from God. An acceptance of equality between all religions formed the basis of Al-Hallaj's intellectual endeavour. Though initially basing himself on the Qur'an, he made use of varied philosophical influences. His pantheism is drawn, in essence, from those Qur'anic verses stating that Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth, that He is light upon light, and that wheresoever you turn, there is Allah's countenance. We are nearer to him than a jugular vein.

Many have taken issue with pantheistic notions that go a long way in negating the distance between what is divine and what is human. The author herself shows reservation regarding the concept, emphasising that pantheism does not mean total unity with the essence or merging one essence with the other, though in fact, many of Al-Hallaj's verses would lead one to that belief. She stops at the belief that life is a derivative of the light of God.

It is a well-known fact that with Al-Hallaj, Sufism did not lead to indifference towards material life, with its social and political concerns. On the contrary, Al-Hallaj's life was marked by an active engagement in the worries and concerns of the people, characterised by wanderings through many regions where he influenced the ideas and thought of innumerable individuals. The demonstrations demanding his release that accompanied his long trial, demonstrations that occurred in many places, testify to the pervasiveness of his ideas.

Al-Hallaj threatened the interests of those who imposed oppressive taxes, who were corrupt or decadent. His Sufi ideas, then, the ideological justification of his execution, were not, in reality the whole reason for his tragic end. Rab'a Al-Adawia had, after all, preceded him in propagating such Sufi notions without facing persecution. At the heart of Al-Hallaj's plight are factors relating to the ongoing political struggle.

The writer believes that Al-Hallaj exerted a strong influence on Avicenna and his philosophy of illumination, based on the notion that illumination is but a derivative from the eternal source of light, God. The radiance of light is the phenomenon giving rise to existence and all existing creation, as she points out. However, there is real evidence to suggest that Al-Hallaj is the originator of a notion widely held since antiquity. The author's assertion, too, that it was Al-Hallaj who introduced to Islamic philosophy the notion of multiplicity in unity remains debatable. What is certain, however, is that Al-Hallaj was a seminal influence on Islamic mysticism; he gave it an edge and highlighted the theory of perfect man and the doctrine of the Mohamadian light or the embodied divine word, epitomised in the image of Mohamed. These ideas of Al-Hallaj's were echoed by many other Sufis, by Ibn Arabi, Ibn Al-Faridd and Al-Sahrawardi.

In her enthusiasm for Sufism, the author goes so far as to identify Sufism and post-Newtonian physics, with quantum theory and the theory of relativity.

The book claims the universe has become a geometrical structure, nothing but a mathematical equation — i.e. a big idea which lost its materialism. Rather naively, the author claims that scientific certainty confirms the fact that the universe is nothing but an imaginary construct that only exists in our minds. A la Berkeley (1685-1753), she reaches the conclusion that there should be one common mind that makes us see the world commonly. She infers from that the existence of a first mind that is the source of all existence. Here the author confuses reality and mathematical symbols, unable or unwilling to see that Al-Hallaj's perception of the universe was unmediated and was reached without conceptualisation or abstraction. Al-Hallaj's contact with the world was reached through taste and intuition.

Science and mysticism deal with two different aspects of existence in two very different manners. Experimentation and verification have nothing to do with knowledge imparted directly by God through mystic intuition. Hence, it is very difficult to contend that divine light is propagated at a velocity of 186,281 miles per second; the distance separating Sufi imagination from a scientific image of the world.

Reviewed by ***Ibrahim Fathi***

Power of the people

Residents are tired to seeing their neighbourhoods defiled by carelessness and vandalism. Now community groups are standing up and taking charge. **Helen Miles** charts the rise of these local initiatives to improve the environment



Some projects are very humble, consisting in the planting of a few trees, but it is a beginning — photos: Al-Ahram

A street cleaning truck drives through Zamalek in the early hours of the morning, its workers on the lookout for refuse surreptitiously dumped down alleys and under flyovers.

School children do their exercises in the gardens of the Ministry of Agriculture in Dokki before heading indoors for games and crafts, while trainee nurses in Heliopolis listen to a seminar on the importance of hygiene in the wards.

The next day Nini Hassan Taher of the Association for the Promotion of Services in Zamalek receives a phone call from a neighbour who has noticed an undetected pile of rubbish and immediately gets in touch with the private cleaning company.

In Dokki, Suhaila El-Sawi of the Committee for Dokki Community Development arrives at the ministry grounds with rolls of paper and a tape machine to be used in the morning's activities, while in Heliopolis members of the Society for the Development of Services in the Heliopolis Community prepare for the next action campaign.

Out there in the streets of Cairo a quiet revolution is taking place. Residents, tired of lodging fruitless complaints with the local authorities about everything from refuse dumping to truant children and poorly equipped hospitals, are taking matters into their own hands. Community groups are springing up and demanding results — not tomorrow, not the next day, but now.

People who have watched the neighbourhoods in which they were born and grew up deteriorate due to lack of care have realised that there is no point sitting around and waiting for things to improve. They know that if they want things to change, its they who have to change them.

The movement began in the late 1970s with the Heliopolis society which was set up by the then vice-president's wife, Suzanne Mubarak, along with other influential members of the community. "A general meeting was held in the Heliopolis Sporting Club to discuss the problems of our district," said Saneya Saleh, chairwoman of the Heliopolis society's cultural committee. "People came to the meeting who were living in Heliopolis and could remember it in the old days. They wanted to see the district get better, not worse."

The Heliopolis society is now the largest and most active of the Cairo community groups with fingers in various pies ranging from relatively modest projects such as tree planting to replacing street signs, to multi-million pound campaigns including building new public libraries and upgrading public hospitals.

The society is run by a board of 11 with Mrs Mubarak at the head, and about 112 members, many of whom have considerable leverage in the government and seats of power. At first, funds were primarily raised through holding bazaars and selling tickets at parties, but now the credibility of the society means donations come in thick and fast.

Although Cairo's other community movements are more humble, their efforts are similarly neighbourhood centred and aimed at encouraging residents to have pride in their surroundings and to look after their area. Noise pollution, infringements of planning laws, grubby public squares and sickly trees all fall into their net.

"A number of us ladies got together and decided it was time to stand up for our rights as inhabitants of this residential area because many things were happening that we were not happy about," said Nini Hassan of the Zamalek Association.

"We felt it was our duty to take care of the place in which we live. At the beginning the governor's reaction was 'Why do you want to clean up Zamalek? It is already the cleanest place in Cairo.' He didn't see the point at all. If Zamalek is beautiful, we want to make it more beautiful."

The Zamalek group started in the early 1990s and despite the governor's initial misgivings, quickly won the support of the authorities, to the point where the governor agreed to allocate the cleaning of the island to a private company in March, 1993.

With this and several other triumphs under their belt, including successfully campaigning to save the historical Fish Garden from the encroachment of urban development projects, the Zamalek Association which has about 50 members, is now forging on with new initiatives. They have secured a grant from the Global Environmental Fund to plant trees and pay for specialists to prune them, and the Egyptian Environmental Agency has agreed to provide the saplings. An urban planner has been contracted to write a proposal for reclamation of Zamalek's pavements, which, like in numerous other parts of the city, can only be walked on with difficulty because they have been broken up during construction work, are used as impromptu car parks or because embassies and official residences fence them off.

A long term plan is also underway to set up environment clubs in government schools in the area as a way of ensuring future generations appreciate the importance of their surroundings and carry on the struggle to clean up the city.

A pilot club was held at the Pakistan International School earlier this year with pupils volunteering to give up one break a week to learn about everything from air pollution to waste disposal. "We are trying to explain to children the worth of plants and trees and the importance of not destroying them. We want to try and use Zamalek as an example that other areas can follow," said Guzine Aref, chairwoman of the Zamalek Association.

The part that children can play in greening Cairo and keeping it tidy is one of the key motifs of the work being done in Dokki. The committee there, which was formed in 1993, was inspired by the work being done in Zamalek. Another community group in Garden City is also thinking of seeking official status following the Zamalek example.

"When we went to the governorate with our complaints, someone always came up with an excuse and blamed the situation on people's behaviour problems," said El-Sawi. "At first this made me very angry and then I came to realise that a lot of the things that we felt needed to be sorted out stemmed from a lack of awareness."

The need to get children involved became apparent when members of the Dokki committee wanted to upgrade a public square in their area. People warned them that there was no point in doing anything because youngsters from a nearby deprived area would only come and destroy their work. Instead of giving up and moving on, committee members visited the area and found that the only place for children to play was in the grounds of a youth centre which had been swallowed up by informal housing.

"By chance one of the shacks had recently been destroyed and we used the plot to have a summer camp," said El-Sawi. "A lot of the children who came lived in appalling conditions sharing one room, they didn't come from a formal family structure and many didn't even go to school."

Initially suspicious, the children's families eventually warmed to the newcomers and another summer camp was held this year. The youngsters — called environment scouts — are mixed with children from local schools and learn about the world around them, using the motto 'Clean and Green.'

Thirteen-year-old Karima Ahmed from Mit Oqba attended the camp and had clearly absorbed the message. "We must tell people not to throw things in the street, because when they do, they ruin the environment and make the streets unclean," said Karima, who admitted she used to throw her sweet wrappers on the street before seeing the error of her ways.

"When we come home from camp we tell our friends and family about what we have learnt in the group. Some people respond, others don't. Changing people's habits will come gradually."



Pot pourri

What little girls are made of

When my brother was born, I was four. The governess hired to look after him hated girls, so the first chance she got to be alone with me she hissed in my ear: "Now that they have a boy they will not want you any more." She looked particularly like an evil bovine and I was not very impressed. Quite rightly so: she was soon fired, and over the years I cannot say that my brother was in any way favoured. I remembered her words, however, during a little scene on the metro the other day.

There was a nice family sitting just opposite me, a mother holding a baby girl (recognisable as such because of her little earrings), with a boy of about six and a girl who could not have been much older.

The girl was dressed in a ladylike manner, including all the necessary ribbons, plastic flowers and hair pins with which mothers are so keen to decorate their daughters. But her pride and joy was obviously a brand new pair of shoes that she was most probably wearing for the first time. They were a complicated affair, dark pink chamois and black patent leather with lots of silvery buttons and a little heel in the form of a prow, more suited to walking on water than on dangerous sidewalks. The little girl kept glancing at her shoes and smiling to herself. The boy, noticing the happy look on her face, suddenly stepped on her foot, rubbing his heel quickly across the pink tip, where he left a black mark. The little girl, obviously horrified, promptly extracted a tissue from her minuscule bag and, without a word, proceeded to rub out the mark. No sooner had she finished than the boy stepped on her foot again. At this point, the girl appealed to the mother, who looked indifferent. She was receiving no sympathy. The mother smiled at the boy, then looked out the window.

Out came another tissue and the little girl set to work delicately on the new stain. Surprisingly, it came off and she stopped to admire her handiwork. The boy looked slightly miffed. He must have hoped for more trouble. Momentarily forgetting his older sister, he pinched the baby, who awoke from her slumber with a start and began to bellow. The mother looked annoyed at the baby and, *lifting her higab, began to breastfeed her.* Peace was restored, to the boy's apparent dismay. Bored, he pulled his older sister's hair. The pins and plastic flowers came tumbling down, to his entire satisfaction. Still without a word, the little girl repinned her hair — not as artistically as before, but she did the best she could under the circumstances. Absentmindedly, the mother patted her son on the head, telling him vaguely that he was *being a good boy.*

The carriage was full of women benignly watching the scene. Obviously sympathy went to the boy. He was acting the real little man, harassing his sisters. A passenger offered him a biscuit. He grabbed it and shoved it in his mouth, looking mockingly at his sister, who had not been offered any treat. She ignored him, happy probably that her shoes still looked almost new. But the little boy felt that he had not exhausted his credit. He started pulling at his mother's *higab*, disturbing the baby whom he sneakily pinched on the back. Again the mother patted his head, murmuring soothingly. But he was not to be soothed. He wanted more attention. By this time the older girl had removed herself from the scene and was on her knees looking out the window. Her shoes were out of reach. "I want to stand on the seat," *said the little boy in a shrill voice. "You are going* to fall," said the mother, restraining him gently. "I want to stand," whined the little boy, louder and louder. Soon his voice became unbearable. The mother grabbed the little girl's dress and yanked her roughly from the window. "Go stand with your brother," she ordered. "Can't you see that he is upset?"

Rudely yanked from her reverie, the little girl *jumped off the seat and held her hand out to her* brother. "She is always in another world," said the mother, addressing no one in particular. "She never does anything for her brother." Suddenly annoyed at the baby too, she pulled her breast out of her mouth and shoved her into the girl's arms.

The girl almost lost her balance, then steadied herself and, holding the baby with one arm, led her brother to stand in safety. As soon as he felt *securely on his feet he returned to rubbing his* shoe across the pink chamois, beaming happily while silent tears trickled down his sister's cheeks.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Meat in curdled milk sauce (*rayeb*) Syrian *shikriya*

Ingredients:

1 kilo veal or boneless beef *chunks*
2 cups of meat broth
1 cube of meat stock
6 cups curdled milk (*rayeb*)
2 tbsp. corn flour
2 large onions (thinly sliced)
one egg
butter
salt & pepper

Method:

Boil the meat until cooked, then remove from its stock and set aside. Pour the curdled milk in a cooking pan, add the corn flour after stirring in some cold water, and add the egg (beaten), season *with the cube, salt and pepper.* Pour the meat broth through a strainer and stir countinuously on medium heat until mixture boils and thickens. Add boiled meat, stir, cover and simmer for five to ten minutes at very low temperature.

Sauté the onion rings, *strain and add to the shikriyya* and let simmer for a couple of minutes. Uncover and serve with rice and green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Sub-continental shift

Nigel Ryan sits in the takeaway

A photocopied menu recently came my way, the "inaugural menu" no less, of a new Indian restaurant promising "Authentic Indian Food Prepared by Indian Chefs". And the prices...well, they appeared to verge on the cheaper side of reasonable, a great boon in a city where excellent Indian food is available, but only at a price. At last, I thought, a cheap and cheerful Indian. And off I went.

Expectations were high. Unfortunately I had not been paying attention to my menu which clearly stated that Kantis, the establishment in question, operated essentially as a takeaway. The restaurant offers a few tables and chairs, but these are very much of the fast-food sort, cruelly designed to stop any lingering over a drawn out meal. The interior was neon lit, clips from Indian musicals played on the television screen, and the staff, apart from the two Indian chefs on view at the back of the open kitchen, all sported pink baseball caps worn, mercifully — and perhaps as protection from the neon glare — with the peak at the front...

Now the menu at Kantis is not extensive, which is often a good sign. Few are the establishments *that can afford to maintain a menu running to more* than a page since to do so means, more often than not, that the restaurant is willing to depend on the miracle of the microwave, combined, of course, with the freedom afforded by the freezer. So, though the choice was limited, hopes ran high.

The spinach *pakoras* were off, which seemed strange, since there is plenty of fresh spinach around at the moment. So we opted for mixed vegetable and onion *pakoras* (separate items these), meat and vegetable *samosas*, *shami kababs* — a nod towards the Middle East here, since they were, in effect, *kobeba* — a lamb *biryani* and a chicken dish, rather loosely referred to as a curry, served with *jeera* pillau.

Some menus pose as geography lessons and presume that in addition to choosing your dinner you might also want a brief geography lesson combined with a quick run through major historical events. The menu at Kantis cannot be accused of being pedagogic, but surely it could furnish something a little more explicit than chicken curry. The sub-continent is, after all, a large place with a complex cuisine. The answer came when we ordered. We were asked whether we wanted it spicy or extra spicy. This really was fast foodsville.

The food came quickly. The *samosas* were fine, if not anything to write home about. The *pakoras* had been fried a little too deeply, the mixed vegetables consisting of slices of aubergine, whole green chili peppers and onion rings. The *shami kebabs* — minced meat and lentils, with an occasional raisin thrown in for good measure — seemed to have arrived from India via Lebanon. The mutton *biryani* was a little cool, a little bland, the meat a little too bony. The chicken curry was, well, pieces of chicken in a yellowish, onion based sauce. The *jeera* pillau that accompanied the chicken consisted of suspiciously short-grained rice boiled with whole cumin.

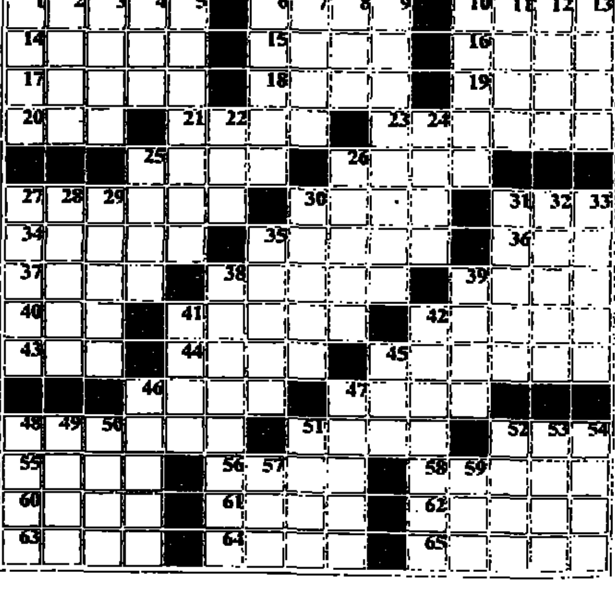
Accompanying these were pots of mint chutney, a chili and garlic sauce and *raita*. Glancing at the bill after the event I found that we had also consumed *parantha*. I can say nothing about the bread beyond that I had forgotten having eaten it.

The bill, when it came, was LE41. Under the total, in block capitals, it announced HOME DELIVERY COMING SOON. It would be unfair to judge Kantis as a restaurant, since it is happy to admit it is a takeaway. Some bleak Friday night in *the future I dare say I will* phone up and order something. But getting off the metal stools on which we had perched for less than an hour, I resolved never to sit on them again.

Kanti's, 20, Gihad Street, Lebanon Square, Mohandessin, 3452163, and at 104 Abbas El-Aqqad St, Medinet Nasr, 4016104

Al-Ahram Weekly Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



ACROSS

1. Female relative (5)
6. Tuber (4)
10. Enclosure (4)
14. Diplomatic representative (5)
15. Small wild ox of Celebes (4)
16. Egg on (4)
17. Locale (5)
18. Torso bones (4)
19. Waistband (4)
20. Bitumen (3)
21. Spoils (4)
23. Effaces (6)
25. Peep of day (4)
26. So be it (4)
27. Slash (6)
30. Patulous (4)
31. Busy insect (3)
34. Carriage (5)
35. Fuse together (5)
36. Negligent (3)
37. Drift; stream (4)
38. Tantalize (5)
39. Mata ... (4)
40. Employ (3)
41. Cooked juice of meat (5)
42. Small mountain lakes (5)
43. Fix (3)
44. Citrus fruit (4)
45. Take into custody (6)
46. Purple-brown (4)
47. Overstuff (4)
48. Never forgive oneself (6)
51. Verse composition (4)
52. Deer (3)
55. Pale yellowish brown (4)
56. Sacred cow (4)
58. Long wide piece of timber (5)
60. Spindly (4)
61. Force out (4)
62. Type of 65 Down (5)
63. A few (4)
64. Seines (4)
65. Swords (5)

DOWN

1. Snuggery (4)
2. A royal race in Peru (4)
3. Always (4)
4. Scrutinize (3)
5. Face feature (7)
6. A European aristocrat (5)
7. Element; item (4)
8. High ball at tennis (3)
9. Cellar (8)
10. Castro is one (5)
11. Scandinavian coins (4)
12. Make eyes at (4)
13. Loved ones (4)
22. Be under obligation (3)
24. Tear to pieces (4)
25. Cut into small cubes (4)
26. Mimicry (5)
27. Rhythmical stress (5)
28. Clamour (5)
29. Younger son (5)
30. A shade of green (5)
31. Sound loudly (5)
32. Deserves (5)
33. Be (5)
35. Rebuke (5)
38. Abrasion (8)
39. Inflict injury on (4)
41. Paste (4)
42. Step heavily on (7)
45. Metric measure (3)
46. Dried plum (5)
47. Young horses (5)
48. Softens flax by soaking (4)
49. Reverberate (4)
50. Surly (4)
51. Station; mail (4)
52. A northern European (4)
53. Aforetime (4)
54. Supplements (4)
57. Payable (3)
59. Wash against (3)



Last week's solution

Beyond the walls of an asylum

Sprawling across tens of acres of prime Cairo real estate, Egypt's oldest mental hospital, Al-Abassiya, has been the subject of fierce debate, within the psychiatric profession and outside it. Horror stories about the abuse of patients have combined with the effects of spending cuts and covetous commercialism to put the future of the hospital, and of the country's public mental health care system, in the balance. **Sahar El-Bahr** investigates



Do we begrudge them a care facility located on prime land in the heart of the capital?

photos: Abdel-Wahab El-Sehiti

Tall, drab fences and weary looking trees line the end of Salah Salem St. in Cairo's Al-Abassiya district. Tucked away behind the railings, out of sight, and in many cases, out of mind, is Al-Abassiya Mental Hospital, a once stately palace donated in 1890 by the royal family to be used as a hospital for the mentally ill.

Some years after its establishment, the hospital grew in prestige, becoming recognised as one of the most distinguished mental institutions in the world. But a century later, the unkempt grounds and run-down buildings which house 2,000 patients reflect few, if any, vestiges of its distinguished past.

The hospital has fallen on more than hard times. Allegations that patients are routinely physically and mentally abused by the nursing staff have sparked a wave of controversy, which recently has mushroomed into a debate on whether the hospital should remain standing at all.

Dr Ibrahim Fathi, a psychiatrist who left Al-Abassiya hospital last year following 12 years of service, expressed disgust at the degree of misdirected authority nurses wielded over patients. "They [nurses] often treated the patients abominably, torturing them mercilessly, tying them to the bed and then beating and insulting them," he said. He claimed that hospital administrators turned a blind eye to such abuses.

And as doctors usually rely on the observations of the nursing staff, the reports they received were often entirely fabricated, Fathi claimed further. "As a result," he said, "the patients never got the treatment they required."

Dr Abdallah Mansour, currently director of Al-Mattar Mental Hospital, worked in Al-Abassiya hospital from 1986 to 1992. He maintains that while incidents of abuse did occur, the root of the problem can be traced back to the close-mindedness of society.

"It would be unfair to put all the blame on the nurses," he argued. "They work extremely long hours in deplorable conditions, and for their trouble, receive low wages," remarked Mansour, adding, "Society's blatant indifference to the field of psychiatry and the plight of the mentally ill is the true culprit."

The debate on Al-Abassiya and public mental institutions generally, changed focus lately when the Ministry of Health (MOH) initiated action to liquidate the hospital, release many of the patients, presumably back to their families, and move the others to Al-Khanka Mental Hospital in Al-Qalioubiya governorate. The decision, which seemed to ignore the fact that a high percentage of the chronically ill patients have no families to go back to, and that Al-Khanka is already grossly overcrowded, triggered a storm of protest from the psychiatric profession in the country.

An outraged Professor Ahmed Okasha, the president of the Arab and Egyptian Psychiatry Associations and secretary of the World Psychiatry Organisation, lodged a scathing complaint stating that the ministry's decision was a blatant violation of the UN's 1992 declaration on the human rights of the mentally ill. He followed up this charge by circulating a petition among 24 fellow professors and psychiatrists which was later published in the daily *Al-Ahram*. The petition, addressed to the minister of health, asserted that "this decision completely ignores the rights of the mentally ill, and disregards the importance of psychiatrists and psychiatry."

In an exclusive interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, a still angry Okasha charged that the ministry's decision will, among other things, render the hospital inaccessible to the relatives of patients from among the poor. But, he added, even if this predicament is overlooked, the fact remains that officials still want to close down the hospital and "de-institutionalise" the treatment of mental patients.

"If one takes into account that nearly 60 per cent of Al-Abassiya's patients have been locked in behind its gates for longer than anyone can recall, it would be impossible to expect them to function effectively in the outside world," said Okasha. "Moreover, since many of these patients have lost track of their families, the adoption of this policy would undoubtedly result in an increase in the level of crime, drug abuse and homelessness in the cities."

The fact that Al-Abassiya's grounds sprawl over prime real estate has given a non-medical turn to the debate. While the MOH and business leaders maintain that the hospital occupies too much land, critics of the MOH's decision charge that for years Al-Abassiya's 70 feddans have been deemed by many as too precious to house the mentally ill. Describing this attitude as one of "cultural backwardness", Dr Gamal Madi Abul-Azayem, director of Al-Abassiya hospital from 1967-1977, counters that "allocating 70 feddans in the middle of a capital for the care of the mentally ill indicates that the government respects the rights of individuals, irrespective of whether or not they are mentally ill."

Critics, however, refer to a number of substantial encroachments on Al-Abassiya's grounds that have taken place already. Ten years ago, a large contracting company, The Arab Contractors Company (Osman Ahmed Osman), received government sanction to expropriate 10 feddans from the hospital grounds to use as a storage site. The company, unfettered by restrictions, subsequently built a housing project on the land and sold it. In addition, another 10 feddans were seized by the governor of Cairo, and turned into a public park. A third portion of the hospital compound was taken over and added to the neighbouring exhibition grounds.

According to Dr Abdallah Mansour, Abul-Azayem and other mental health specialists, the crux of the matter is that the system is as much to blame as the society that embraces it. In Egypt, there are currently 110 psychiatrists, resulting in a 1:200,000 doctor-patient ratio. Moreover, a large percentage of Egyptian psychiatrists practice in other Arab countries for the simple reason that they can earn more than ten-times the salary they would make working in their home country.

Therefore, argued Mansour, whether or not the hospital is "ugly" does not address the fundamental issue that the supply of professional care does not even approach the demand. This hospital, he argued, after some administrative and logistic changes, can adequately meet the needs of its 2,000 patients.

Appeals to reform the hospital rather than shut it down are not new. In 1987, Dr Ibrahim Fathi, along with 50 other hospital doctors, went on strike, calling for a shift to modern psychiatric methodology. The hospital director vociferously opposed the doctors' initiative. In the end the doctors prevailed; the director and his staff were fired, but for Fathi, the victory was hollow.

"We were ambitious, unrealistic and thought we could make a difference," Fathi bitterly recalled. "But after 12 years of futile endeavours, I became disillusioned and resigned — nothing had changed at all."

The current administration, although still new, has also come under fire. Fathi charged that the hospital is encouraging patients to leave even though they are still ill.

The hospital's senior psychiatrist, Dr Said Abul-Enein, strongly denied such allegations. Vehemently asserting, "I am not lying and have nothing to justify," he maintained that despite a lack of funding, conditions in the hospital are improving dramatically.

The new director of Al-Abassiya, Dr Sayed El-Qot, reorganised the hospital into seven small units, the rationale being that 2,000 patients, lumped together in one building, are impossible to monitor. In addition, a class system has been devised whereby patients are divided into four financial ability-determined categories; First Class patients pay LE12 per day, Second Class-A patients pay LE7 per day and Second Class-B patients pay LE5. Free Class patients, who comprise the majority, are admitted into this category after proving that they are indigent.

Other changes have also been implemented. Contracts have been signed with several food companies to provide the hospital with well-balanced, palatable meals. New beds, linens and clothes have been purchased. The budget for medication has been increased from LE290,000 to almost LE1.5 million. The sewage, electrical and water systems have been updated and new sports and recreational equipment has been procured. Finally, several handicraft classes have been introduced, and the library has been updated with the latest in audio-visual equipment and psychiatry books.

These changes may prevent the patients from going stir-crazy, but some fundamental inadequacies, such as staff shortage and inadequate patient care, still prevail.

Dr Taher El-Shafie, the hospital's deputy director, commented "The number of mentally ill people in Cairo by far exceeds the space available in the hospital, but at least with the new administration at the reins, a larger number of those who require help will be able to receive it."

To cater to the increasing number of admittances, the hospital is adopting a new, revolving-door policy where patients are admitted, treated immediately, kept under strict supervision and then released as soon as possible. This policy may not sit well with critics, but given space and staffing constraints, El-Shafie sees it as the most feasible method of addressing the problem. He noted, "Mental illness is a non-traditional disease with no definite or permanent symptoms. It is difficult to predict why or when the next nervous breakdown will occur."

The pattern of abuse, fostered under previous administrations, has also seen the end of its era, El-Shafie asserts. Now, any nurse accused of abuse, is "directly referred to the police while in the past they would only be subject to punishment by the administration," he said. As to the latest surge in patient deaths which rocked the hospital, El-Shafie cited the recent heat wave as being the reason. "Many of the patients do not respond normally to many stimuli. They may sit for hours in direct sunlight without being aware of the potential harm," he explained. Not surprisingly, they fell victim to sun and heat stroke.

But again, the root of the problem can be traced to a shortage of staff. The hospital currently employs one resident physician, three psychologists, 37 psychiatrists, seven assistant psychologists, 235 male nurses, 160 female nurses and 10 nutritionists. To take care of the 70 feddans of land and the buildings, it employs three plumbers, one gardener and 24 miscellaneous maintenance workers. In order to avoid incidents such as the deaths by heat stroke, the hospital administrators are actively seeking new professionals to join the staff full time.

Abul-Enein admitted, however, to a change of policy as far patient admittance and maintenance was concerned. "Now, this hospital is prepared to deal only with emergency cases," he said. "This is a hospital, not an old age home," Abul-Enein asserted.

People, Abul-Enein argued, are still unwilling to understand the fact that mentally ill patients are not necessarily afflicted for life. Seated behind his desk, he recalled a recent incident where the brother of a patient was asked to come and discharge his brother, who had been in the hospital for 40 years. "The patient's file had been located, and it was noted that he was ready to be released quite a long time ago," he said. "The brother, however, was extremely upset at the prospect of taking his brother home, and cited a variety of reasons why this was not a viable option."

Efforts to convince the man to take his brother home fell short of the target until Abul-Enein threatened to send the patient, along with a policeman and a hospital representative, to the brother's home.

The hospital's administrators now require families to sign a form, prior to committing a patient, affirming that they will visit the relative at least once a week. In the past, family members had been thrown into the hospital, and forgotten for months, and in many cases, years at a time.

"If I had to accommodate everyone whose condition resembles that of this elderly man, I would have half of Egypt seeking to be admitted to the hospital," Abul-Enein said.

The head of the Egyptian Psychiatric Association, Professor Ahmed Okasha, is unconvinced however. The fact that available mental hospitals are over-loaded should not justify sending patients away, or for that matter, closing these hospitals down. "Is it not absurd that the effects of the extreme shortage of mental hospitals are being used to justify demolishing those we already have?" he exclaims.





Most specialists agree that public mental health care in Egypt is in an extremely sorry state. They diverge widely, however, on how to deal with the problem

Sordid fact, or tragic fantasy?

Patients at Al-Abassiya Mental Hospital generally fall under three categories. The first group are the criminally insane, who have been referred to the hospital by the courts. They are discharged only after a review of their case by the prosecutor general and the hospital council. The second category of patients are those who voluntarily admit themselves. They are free to leave whenever they wish, regardless of the psychiatrists' recommendations and assessment. The last category are those who are deemed legally incapable of controlling their actions, and are to reside in the hospital until their discharge is approved by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Health.

Whatever the category, the personal stories are always tragic. Some are doubly so since — as in the stories recounted to the Weekly *by the patients themselves and published below — it is extremely difficult to ascertain whether they are true or the fantasies of a sick mind.*

Case 1: "Alia"

"Alia", who is unsure of her exact age, but believes it to be in the mid-60s, was arrested while begging in front of one of the hundreds of mosques in Cairo. After a swift trial, she found herself in Al-Abassiya hospital.

"At first," she mumbled, "I was relieved that I was being sent to a hospital. I imagined that it would be better than prison, but after ten long years here, I assure you, prison, in comparison, would be a welcome relief."

"Here, the nurses constantly beat me up and leave me to starve for days," she sobbed, adding, "They never pay attention to us, never provide us with enough care, and never let us out of our dormitories."

Case 2: "Zenhom"

At first glance, this attractive 30-year old woman seems to be the last person who should be committed to a mental institution. She is intelligent, well spoken and completely aware of her predicament. However, fate has not been kind to her.

"Before I came to the hospital," she recalled, "I lived with my family in a small village. I wasn't married and made the mistake of sleeping with a man."

"Word got around, and the ensuing scandal led my family to give me an ultimatum: be committed to a hospital or be put to death," she said with a laugh of disgust. "The choice was obvious."

When her father brought her to Al-Abassiya, he told the psychiatrist that she had been behaving oddly, creeping out in the middle of the night to slaughter animals and do "other strange things."

"I had to be convincing, so in front of the doctor, I put on an act. I had worn clothes which hung on my body in tatters, and had smeared my face with dirt. I kept on moving my lips and eyebrows, stuck out my tongue and said things which had no meaning," she spat out in anger at the memory.

While the doctor was frantically filling the forms for her admission, she played with everything in the office, knocking over the furniture and breaking whatever fell into her hands. "When the doctor asked for my name, I avoided his eyes by staring at the ceiling for several minutes, not uttering a word the entire time," she said. "But when he finally lost his patience, I shouted out a man's name, 'Zenhom'. He then asked me what I wanted, and I told him I wanted to marry a mechanic."

This, apparently, was enough to convince the psychiatrist. "In less than ten minutes, I went from being a free individual, able to choose my own course in life, to a mentally incapacitated individual imprisoned within the confines of an asylum."

"At first, I was intimidated by the other patients," she said, "but after a while, I realised that there were many women here who are victims of circumstances, and also found themselves trapped."

But she added, "I'm luckier than most. At least my parents send me money on a regular basis. To experience a minimum of comfort here, you have to pay for everything, including a glass of water."

This is where her luck stops. Legally speaking, by being committed to an institution, Zenhom has involuntarily renounced all inheritance, property and fiscal rights. All her possessions were distributed to her next of kin.

Case 3: "Fatma"

"After my husband passed away, I was left to take care of my five young sons by myself. With no source of income and a large, outstanding funeral debt, I began to search for work," said Fatma.

"After several weeks of begging on the streets and looking for work, I found a job working as a maid for a wealthy family. After I finished my daily chores, I would rummage through their garbage to find food for my children," she recalled, her voice hushed with shame at the memory.

For years, Fatma managed barely to make ends meet. She brought up her sons, one of whom was severely retarded. The other four sons got married and moved out, leaving her once again alone to care for the fifth son.

"Over the years, his condition worsened, but I was able to manage up until the day when I became seriously ill and didn't have the strength to work in order to pay the rent for the small room we lived in, or care for myself let alone my son. It was at that point that I asked my eldest son if I could live with him and his wife," she said.

What happened next was a painful awakening for Fatma. "His response to my plea was to curse the day he was born and the poor conditions he had grown up in," Fatma remembered with tears welling up in her eyes. "I was so upset. I told him that he and his brothers should appreciate all that I had tried to do, and did, for them, but he just said that I was crazy. He then brought me to the hospital against my will."

Fatma has now spent over five years at the institution.

Edited by **Fouad El-Gawhary** and **Tarek Attia**





Vital issues raised in the main conference hall photos: Mohamed El-Oi'i | Mamdouh El-Beltagui and Peter Shackleefield in discussion | Action at the Arab Travel Market photo:Amr Gamal

Tourism on the Market

Last week the third International Arab Travel Market opened at the Cairo International Conference Centre, with 145 exhibitors from 22 countries. Rehab Saad toured the show

Tour operators, travel agents, hotels, tourist villages and transport agencies from inside and outside the Arab world, seized the opportunity to make contacts with travel professionals from all over the world by taking part in the International Arab Travel Market, which ran parallel to the general assembly of the World Tourist Organisation (WTO).

"Workshops were held for travel agency representatives who wanted to meet each other and make deals," explained Ahmed Hafez, president of the IATM. "The value of contracts signed so far between Egyptian agents and Arab and foreign ones is estimatated at about $70 million."

Among Arab countries participating were Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen and Libya; non-Arab countries — South Africa, Iran, Cyprus, Turkey and Greece — also took part. Egypt was particularly well-represented, with coverage of hotels and holiday villages, and areas like Luxor, the New Valley and recently re-opened locations like Assiut.

"This is the first time we have participated in a tourist market in Egypt," said the public relations manager of the Cham Hotel in Damascus. She described tourism between Arab countries as "something very necessary". For that reason, she said, participation in such a market was invaluable.

However, Amr Al-Najjar, marketing manager of Saptco Saudi Public Transport Company, felt that holding the IATM on the sidelines of the WTO was a double-edged sword. "It is a great chance for us as exhibitors to have contact with all these countries which are here for the general assembly, but at the same time most of the participants are, of course, attending the WTO meetings, and so have less time to visit the market. It would be more beneficial to keep an event as strong as the IATM separate in the future," he said.

The effect of political changes on the industry was noted by Jordanian travel company representative Jihad Marmash.

"After the signing of the peace treaty, about 100,000 Israelis visited Jordan and about 5,000 Jordanians went to Israel," he said. And large numbers of religious tourists from other countries are now passing through Jordan on their way to Jerusalem. According to Marmash, about 30,000 visitors from Southeast Asia and about 15,000 from Indonesia crossed Jordan en route to Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque. "By 1996, it is expected that about a million visitors will cross Jordan to Jerusalem," he said. And further progress in the peace process should bring more visitors, he believes.

Marmash made it clear that there were still barriers between Jordan and Israel — stressing that Jordanian tourism to Israel was on religious grounds only. "We are not visiting Israel to shake hands with the Israelis but to visit our Palestinian brothers and to support them there."

While some participants in the market are well-established as tourist destinations, others are still trying to break into the field, often hampered by political problems. Among them was Libya. "We took part to prove that we exist," said Abubakr Karmos, the operations manager of a Libyan travel agency. "Tourism in Libya is still in its early stages. We want to demonstrate that we have an ancient civilisation which is worth visiting. We also have a 2000km Mediterranean coast, vast deserts suitable for desert tourism, old cities and museums," he explained. Libya was targeting the markets of Germany and Italy, as well as Switzerland, Britian and Belgium, Karmos said.

"But because of the flight embargo on Libya, we get very few tourists. The ones we have come by ferry from Malta or from Jerba in Tunisia. We collect them from the border by bus," he explained.

Yemen is another Arab country trying to find a way into the market. "The whole country is an open museum, with old buildings, mosques, and fortresses," *enthused* Yehia Ahmed Al-Heithy, manager of a Yemeni travel agency. "There are also opportunities for desert tourism, with camels or four-wheel drives. And we have a massive coastline with diving areas, and high mountains."

The 1992 Gulf War devastated Yemeni tourism, and many European travel agencies which sent visitors to Yemen went bankrupt. "That was followed by the Yemeni civil war and last year's political strife. Tourists were kidnapped and rumours spread," said Al-Heithy. However, he emphasised, the Yemeni government is now actively promoting tourism, and a tourism conference is planned for 1996.

Perhaps an even more unusual would-be destination is Iran, represented by five large travel companies determined to promote their country's tourist potential.

"This is the first time that Iranian travel agents have come here after the Islamic revolution," said Cyrus Etemadi of the Caravan Sahara travel agency, who stressed: "We have nothing to do with politics. We are just here on business." Etemadi said that about 86 foreign travel agencies in various countries are sending groups to Iran though his company. "So far this year I have brought about 50 French groups to Iran, as well as six groups from Germany and a lot of Japanese". These figures, he said, proved that the country was safe.

Just because Iran attracts few westerners does not mean that there are no tourists. According to Etemadi, around 300,000 tourists visit Iran each year, mainly from ex-Soviet Union countries. "It is very easy for them to cross the borders and come into Iran," he explained.

Etemadi blames a negative image in the international media for the lack of Western visitors. "Tourism in Iran is not *haram* (forbidden)," he insisted. "The only restrictions we have is that women must cover their hair and there is no alcohol available. If tourism was forbidden in our country we would not have participated in this market or in the international markets we have attended in London, France and Germany."

Meanwhile, South Africa is *trying to promote itself* as a destination for Egyptian visitors. "Egypt is still a new market for us. From January to June 1995 about 12,000 South Africans visited Egypt, whereas only 1,500 Egyptians came to South Africa," said Erick Van Zyl of the South African Tourism Board. "This is completely unbalanced. It may be partly because we don't have a tourist office in Egypt. Thus one of our objectives here is to make contacts with Egyptain agencies." According to Van Zyl, South Africa has seen a big influx of visitors from Europe and Asia, but the Middle East as a whole is still a new market. "People still do not know what South Africa has to offer. If the travel agencies knew more about our country, they would bring a lot of visitors," he said.

Seminars held during the market included a symposium on new strategies for Arab tourism. Saeb Nahhas, head of the Association of Travel Agencies in Syria, highlighted the importance of removing international travel restrictions to allow free movement within the Arab world.

He cited Syria's decision to allow Arabs to enter Syria without a visa as a step in the right direction.

Mohamed Amin Abu Al-Shammat, the Syrian minister of tourism, spoke about the importance of tourism to the Arab world and the fact that Arab countries do not get their fair share of international tourism. "The percentage of tourists who come to Arab countries is no more than 2.6 per cent of the total of international tourism, a figure which does not match our tourist potential," he said.

Focusing on the Arab market, he urged greater marketing efforts within the Arab world, and the need for more Arab markets like the IATM to promote inter-Arab tourism. He also stressed the need for greater Arab investment in tourism.

Adel Abdel-Aziz, head of the Egyptian Tourist Authority, agreed that more promotion was needed. "We sometimes fail to advertise in Arab countries *because we take it for* granted that Arabs will visit each other without any encouragement," he said. "However, there are a lot of markets competing with us to attract the Arab clientele. We should tackle promotion seriously."

More agreements signed

SEVERAL countries have already signed tourist agreements, protocols and executive programmes with Egypt in an effort to boost tourism. Egyptian Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui has put his signature to agreements with Russia, Slovenia, the Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Malta, South Africa, Vietnam and Syria. All deal in some way with cooperation in tourist marketing and promotion, training and the exchange of expertise and joint tourist investments.

— The agreement with the Ukraine deals with the facilitation of border procedures and visa arrangements for tourists from both countries.

– Egypt and Uzbekistan are studying the possibility of opening tourist offices in Cairo and Tashkent to promote tourism between the two countries. A joint committee, to be convened every two years, will be established to pursue the implementation of this agreement.

— Under the agreement with Russia, the two parties will encourage the exchange of specialist tourist groups attending sports events, musical and theatrical festivals, markets, symposia and conferences. The two countries also agreed to exchange statistics and information regarding legislation on tourism between the two countries, especially with regards to the protection and conservation of the natural and cultural heritage.

_ In a meeting with Beltagui, the Hungarian minister of tourism requested that both countries examined the possibility of abolishing the requirement for entry visas. Hungary has already reached such an agreement with Tunisia.

— The Czech delegation confirmed that Czech Airlines is going to increase its trips to Egypt from two to three trips a week.

— Both Beltagui and Françoise de Panafieu, the French minster of tourism, discussed the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism's media and advertising campaigns in the French market. The French minister declared that the tourism flow from France to Egypt has increased at least by 30 per cent, a figure which *was confirmed by tour operators*.

— Bilateral meetings were held between the Egyptian minister of tourism and tourism ministers and heads of delegations from other countries including France, Algeria, Mexico, Italy, Hungary, Pakistan, Chile, Mali, Moldova, Cameroon, Malawi, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Uganda.

Focus on

Silk Road

For 2,000 years, an international trade route, known as the Silk Road, linked central China and the Mediterranean, spanning over 7,000km. In a seminar this week countries along the road, including Egypt, discussed the possibility of making the Silk Road into a tourist destination.

Participants agreed to adopt a joint marketing and promotion plan, holding an exhibition every year in a different country on the road. They also agreed on cooperation in establishing and managing hotels and exchanging experience.

China's National Tourism Administration has proposed that a Silk Road forum be held from 17-20 June 1996 in Xilan, the starting point of the ancient route. This proposal has been endorsed by the WTO.

Environmental awareness

As a symbol of Egypt's concern for the environment, around 50 trees were planted in the garden surrounding the Cairo International Conference Centre in a ceremony attended by Antonio Savignac, secretary-general of the WTO, heads of delegations and Egyptian officials. More trees will be planted in Fustat Gardens with the participation of hotels in the Cairo and Giza areas — hotel representatives will plant trees corresponding to the number of rooms in each of their hotels.

Tourism Internet

A section in the Cairo International Conference Centre was devoted to a display of the Internet and its different uses in tourism and other fields. Tourist data held on the Internet includes information about hotels, Nile cruises, tourist villages, and travel agencies. In the future, tourists will be able to use the Internet to book a room in a hotel or tourist village from their own homes.

Resolutions for the future

In the closing session last sunday, delegates at the 11th World Tourism Organisation General Assembly made resolutions on some of the most vital issues for the industry in the twenty-first century

This year's General Assembly of the WTO in Cairo, described by the organisation's secretary-general Antonio Savignac as "a world tourist *summit*", was the biggest in the WTO's history in terms of the number of delegations. The organisation has grown even larger following the Assembly's approval of the membership of nine new states: the Central African Republic, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, Botswana, Mozambique, the Republic of Macedonia, Andorra, Myanmar and Costa Rica, in addition to 94 new affiliate members from the private sector. *To finance this international body*, the assembly approved a 1996-7 budget of $18,099,000.

In recognition of its responsibility to the industry and those who work in it, this year's General Assembly tackled the subject of sex tourism. Delegates passed a resolution rejecting sex tour*ism as exploitative and subversive* to the fundamental objectives of tourism. The WTO pledged to initiate a three-pronged action plan — urging governments to take measures to counter organised sex tourism; asking the travel trade to strengthen professional codes of conduct and to educate staff about its negative consequences; and encouraging the media and the travelling public to promote awareness of the problems associated with it, especially child prostitution and AIDS.

With an eye on new avenues of tourism, the WTO approved a project to promote the Silk Road as a tourist destination (see brief), and applauded the cooperation agreement between the new republics of central Asia to open their region to visitors. It also endorsed the Slave Route project, which aims to attract visitors interested in the history of the slave trade through the preservation and restoration of buildings connected with the trade.

The assembly also accepted Indonesia's proposal to hold the Bali Forum on Tourism for local *parliamentarians and officials in June* 1996, an important way for the WTO to communicate the significance of tourism and the need for careful planning and environmental protection to local decision-makers outside the tourism sector.

Egypt took over the chairmanship of the General Assembly this year, and Egyptian Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui emphasised WTO delegates' confidence in Egypt, both as a safe destination and as an efficient organiser of large events. Therefore, he said, "Egypt has decided that during its chairmanship it will share its experience in the field of tourism with other members of the organisation." He also pledged that Egypt would do its best to implement all the General Assembly's recommendations.

The promise to share expertise was put into practice at a workshop dealing with tourism and the media, where delegates discussed Egypt's successful experience in dealing with the tourist crisis.

On a regional level, the launching of MEMTTA (Middle East Mediterranean Travel and Tourism Association) was discussed at one of the Assembly's five plenary sessions. Delegates drew attention to the Middle East's attractions as a tourist destination, and its need to increase its share of the global tourism market, particularly in the light of the peace process. The inauguration of MEMTTA *will be formally announced at the Amman* summit next week.

The assembly also held three round tables, dealing with exporting new tourism marketing opportunities, the importance of quality in tourism, and public-private partnerships.

Beltagui and the secretary-general of the WTO, *Antonio Savignac, announced at a press conference* this week that the next General Assembly will be held in Turkey. World Tourism Day in 1996 will be dedicated to "tourism, peace and tolerance"; and looking ahead to 1997, World Tourism Day that year will adopt the slogan "environment, employment and job opportunities".

RS

Digging for experience

Egypt's first archeological field school has been opened in Memphis. Sherine Nasr reports on its aims and potentials

Supreme Council of Antiquities inspectors can now receive six weeks on-site training in digging techniques thanks to a new archeological field school recently opened in Mit Rahina (Ancient Memphis), about 30km from Cairo. The first of its kind, the school will cater for trainees from the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) under the direction of American Egyptologist, Dr Diana Greg.

The project, funded by USAID and supervised by the American Research Centre in Egypt (ARCE), was set up to train Egyptian inspectors in the latest excavation methods. Each course is funded to the tune of US$100,000, with funding promised for at least three more courses.

Greg first put forward the idea for a school five years ago, but it was only last year that plans started to materialise. "I thought it would be a good idea to share expertise between Americans and Egyptians and that is how the idea of a field school developed," said Greg.

Five Egyptian inspectors first attended a six-week field school course in Mexico and Oregon, USA. "We needed Egyptian supervisors who had the background that they could share with other members of the SCA," said Greg. "Although the inspectors were trained in America, the principles, methodology and techniques are the same as they are here." These inspectors form the core of the teaching staff at the Memphis school.

The most difficult part of the project was choosing a suitable site where trainees could practise their *skills under close supervision. Mit Rahina* — an ancient settlement site — was selected because it presents one of the most difficult archeological challenges. "In settlement archaeology you work with mud brick which is hard to isolate and there are also thin layers of floors and debris and other remains mixed up together. It is the most complicated type of excavation to learn," explained Greg. "If you can master settlement archeology other types of excavation like desert excavation are much easier."

During the inaugural course held this June and July, 17 inspectors were taught the various stages of an excavation, from cutting the sides of trenches, to scraping and removing dirt to locate mud bricks, and the correct way to report and date findings. Although there are no inscriptions on site, the trainees also learnt how to record inscriptions which are often found at other digs.

The course work consisted of field training from 5.30am until noon, after which each inspector would submit his notes and there would be lectures and opportunities to discuss technical points with Greg and her assistants.

During the excavation, the team unearthed a number of interesting objects including amulets and fragments of pottery which, in turn, were used to date the earth strata where they were found.

Although the trainees could only cover the basics of scientific excavation during the six-week course, the skills they learned can be applied at a variety of archeological sites in Egypt. "Many of the students now have a good background knowledge of the subject and seemed interested in learning more," said Greg. "They were hardworking, cooperative and promising students, who only need more practice."

The need for highly trained archaelogists is essential to the future of archeology in Egypt, according to Dr Abdel-Halim Noureddin, head of the SCA. "It is the SCA's policy to upgrade the scientific standards of the younger generation through direct coop*eration with foreign institutions," he said. In addition,* promising inspectors will be recommended to pursue their academic studies abroad, Noureddin added.

Dr Mark Easton, director of the ARCE, said the school had been a success. "It will do much to consolidate the American-Egyptian cultural relations. I am going to try to convince USAID to provide additional money for four more seasons, and I think we'll get it."

Answer now!

__Question 4__
In November 1954, a huge funerary boat was discovered at Giza near Khufu's Pyramid. What kind of wood is it made of?

Previous October quiz questions were:

__Question 1__ Salaheddin is often identified as an Arab conqueror and ruler. This is incorrect. What nationality was he?

__Question 2__ A well-known market in Upper Egypt is the end of the caravan route from Sudan. What is its name?

__Question 3__ A famous English novelist wrote a book entitled *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile* in 1877. Who was she?

Send the answers to all four questions to *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Prizes this month are donated by **Sonesta Hotels, Resorts and Nile Cruisers, Helnan Shepheard's Hotel** and the **Supreme Council for Antiquities.** Sonesta is offering a double room for two nights on a bed-only basis in their Beach Resort Hurghada; Helnan Shepheard's is donating dinner for two at the Italiano Restaurant; the Supreme Council for Antiquities is presenting free passes to historical sites.

Name...
Address...
Tel. No. (if available)..
Answer to Question 1, issue 241
Answer to Question 2, issue 242
Answer to Question 3, issue 243
Answer to Question 4, issue 244
Post your entry to
Travel Quiz
Al-Ahram Weekly,
Al-Ahram,
9th Floor,
Sharia Al-Galaa,
Cairo.



Advantage Egypt?

The sweetest victories are the hardest fought, and Egypt's squash players are in the mood for a rumble. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports

As the Heliopolis Club opens its gates to 128 squash players from the world-over for the 5th International Squash Open Championship, which will be held in Cairo from 28 October to 4 November, Egypt's squash pros will likely be among the first in line to stake their claim to new rankings and $25,000 in prizes.

For the Egyptian players the Heliopolis Open title has so far been a goal versus an accomplishment. But this could be the year when the winds of change blow in their favour.

Over the past year, the male and female competitors have managed to significantly advance their international rankings by participating in other international competitions.

Squash stars Ahmed Barada and Amir Wagih, who will be the first Egyptians to enter the main draw since the first Heliopolis Open in 1990, are cases in point. Barada has advanced from 60th to 30th while Wagih has jumped from 42nd to 25th. The advances are a result of their successes in open competitions in England, Hungary, Brazil, Japan and the US. Moreover, they are favoured to reach the finals, and either of them could well walk away with the title.

The women face a more uphill battle, but given their previous circumstances, any advances they make will be a step forward. Salma Shabana and Maha Zein, two young up-and-comers, may have to go through the qualifiers before reaching the main draw, but after placing seventh in the team event in last July's Junior World Championship held in Australia, the odds are in their favour. Sibling squash competitors, Rasha and Mai Hegazi also stand a good chance.

The rivalry between Shabana and Zein is perhaps the factor that pushed both of them over the edge. Shabana, who placed third in the Juniors in Australia, subsequently built on that victory and managed to improve her standing from 38th to 29th after other competitions. Zein has leapt from 68th to 39th. Zein will draw upon her experience in the last US Open to give her a boost of confidence to propel her through to the quarter-finals in Heliopolis.

Women's team coach Samiha Abul-Magd is encouraged by these statistics. "This women's team was the first ever to reach the Seniors World Championship which was held in October 1994. They placed second in the category B competition," she said.

"But with the rankings they have achieved so far, coupled with those they will secure after the Heliopolis Open, they will be able to enter the main draw of the women's world championship in 1996," Abul-Magd noted, adding, "I consider this outstanding given that Egypt has never had a women's squash team before, and that this team lacks experience."

Shabana's first match in the Heliopolis Open could be her toughest. She is scheduled to go up against world champion Michel Martin. Zein will also have her hands full as she attempts to dispose of 12th ranked Vicki Cardwell. Should they make it through these matches, they will then have to overcome Liza Irving (3rd), Rebecca Macleen (13th) and Robin Cooper (15th).

The men will face a different kind of competition. World champion Janshir Khan has sent his apologies and is skipping the competition, probably due to his embarrassing 1-3 loss to Barada in an exhibition game played on 17 October in the US Open. In addition, none of the world's top 15 players will be in attendance. But their absence should be more than made up for by 18th ranked Paul Gregory and Greg Rolan, 22nd. Should they prove unable to cut the mustard, Barada and Wagih will also have to overcome fellow Egyptians, Omar El-Brollossy, ranked no. 48 and Ahmed Faizy, ranked no. 61.

Two other Egyptian men will also have a shot at the big leagues. Mohamed Medhat Morsi, ranked 118 and Emad Kereitum, ranked 217 have drawn the wild cards offered by the International Squash Federation. The two men, both members of the Professional Squash Association, will be allowed to skip the qualifiers and move straight into the main draw. For the others not fortunate enough to get the wild cards, the qualifiers will be held on 28-29 October. The main draw will start in the Heliopolis Club on 30 October and the semifinals and finals will take place on 2-3 November.

But win, lose or draw, the male and female members of the national squash team will jet off to the Cyprus Open before returning home in time for the men's world championship scheduled to be held in Cairo beginning 13 November.


photo: Saleh Ibrahim

The Third Arab Horse Festival took place earlier this week at the Zahraa station at Ain Shams. During the three-day event, horses competed in racing, and dressing events. A special event for the most graceful stallion horse was also held

Tosson: Top of the world, ma

When the going gets tough, Tahani Tosson just gets tougher. **Abeer Anwar** talks to Egypt's maestro of spiking



Over the past eight years, Egyptian 24-year-old volleyball star, Tahani Tosson has raked in one title after another. She has been voted the Best Player in the African Championships for seven consecutive years, and Best Player in the Arab Championships in 1988, 1992 and 1995. Tosson has also added four Best Spiker titles to her collection. And just when she thought it couldn't get much better, she was awarded, for the first time, the Best Server title in the African Nations Cup held this September. This year alone, she has collected three different titles.

So, what's the secret of her success this year?

According to Tosson, "This year I decided I wanted to perform even better than in the previous years. I trained harder, built up strength and speed, and accomplished what I wanted."

Her explanation may not be profound, but it is on the money. In fact, Tosson is not one who is short on confidence.

The women's volleyball team did not live up to expectations in the recently concluded Zimbabwe Games. And this may be due to her absence.

"Their [the team's] performance fell short because they were not complete without me. This is not because I was the backbone of the team, but because we trained as a team," she explained. "However, I was the one player who was consistent, and this was what they depended on. When I wasn't able to attend the Games, the team really wasn't complete."

With such an impressive record, one would expect that the world would be her oyster. This, however, is not the case.

Several years ago Tosson decided to turn pro. But, she has encountered numerous contractual difficulties. "Beginning in 1987, when I was 16, I began to be offered contracts," she said. "But the contracts were not that lucrative and were offers to play in distant countries like Australia."

Things have begun to change this year, for the better and for the worse. "This year, the contract offer I received was from Turkey, where our team was participating in a camp in preparation for the Zimbabwe Games," Tosson stated.

"One of the Turkish clubs liked what they saw and offered me a contract. I feel more comfortable with this offer because now I'm more mature and Turkey is not altogether that different from Egypt."

While Tosson is convinced with this offer, the Egyptian Volleyball Federation (EVF) and the Ahli Club, where she trains, are not. Officials within these two organisations maintain that the contract is not lucrative and is too short. It is a six-month contract. Moreover, they add, Tosson will only be participating in the European Championship and will not be registered on the club roster.

These arguments have not swayed Tosson from her position. "I'm interested in the experience, not the money. In addition, I realise I can't be registered in the club because they already have two foreign players and can't include a third," she stressed. "The club, however, did promise that if I did well on their team, they would sign me up for a one-year contract.

After much debate, Ahli officials agreed to lower the amount they were requesting from the Turkish club from LE50,000 to LE25,000, but the EVF remained steadfast.

Sayed Mustafa, the EVF's manager, said, "We have agreed with the Ahli club that we will offer her sufficient funds to compensate her for not signing the contract."

"She's a great player and we want her to play for Egypt in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics."

Tosson, however, is still determined to go to Turkey. "I want to gain the experience. Once I get the Ahli club's approval, the EVF will come around," she said confidently.

Whatever the outcome, Tosson seems poised to keep on spiking and serving her way to the top.

Hatchling hustlers

The billiards craze is sweeping Egypt, but, notes **Eric Asomugha**, the budding pool hall Harrys better not quit their day jobs just yet

For the majority of youths who find their way into Prince Billiards, a new pool hall in Cairo, what counts is what you can do with your cue. At Prince's, as in the dozens of other pool halls that have opened up in Cairo, many of the players are novices who play only for fun.

"Most play simply because they enjoy the game," said Khaled El-Sayed, who has been playing billiards for 12 years. "A few others play competitively. These are the select few who aspire to become professionals."

But whether the dreams are of stardom in the professional billiards circuit, or a quick game with friends, the recent boom in billiard halls around Cairo means that a growing number of people are being introduced to the game. In the recent past, billiards was found in only a few halls like the Rivoli and the Radio, or in some sporting clubs like the Heliopolis or Shooting Clubs. Now, the city boast about 40 billiard halls and several others in the country's various governorates.

The majority of these new halls are geared for American pool rather than snooker or French billiards. However, the only competitions to be found in Egypt are for billiards, not American pool. These league and cup events are organised under the auspices of the Egyptian Billiards Federation.

For those who dare to dream of the big leagues, these competitions are their stepping stone. Sharqiya El-Dokhan's Amr Essam and Suez Canal's Magid Shafik, Egypt's two representatives in next month's English Snooker Championship are EBF members, as are the powerful potter, Hisham Baghati and the young up-and-comer, Emad Nasif. These four hope to join the ranks of Anas Ibrahim and Hisham Saad, two top-ranking French billiards players who have left a trail of miffed opponents in their wake.

The proliferation of new pool halls, however, is no guarantee that Egypt will be turning out the likes of Alex "Hurricane" Higgins, Stephen Hendry, Steve Davis and Jimmy White.

"For now, we don't, and probably won't for a few years, have players of such stature," said Mohamed Gamal, a Rivoli club member. To reach this level of success and proficiency, sponsorships and support are necessary. "In Egypt, we don't promote pool to the extent that Americans or Europeans do. Here, it depends on individual initiative," he added.

Hossam El-Dalati, another Rivoli club member, agrees. "Not enough resources are invested in promoting the sport or training players," he said. Pool he maintained, should become a professional sport in Egypt, and coaches must be recruited for the players.

As it stands now, he argued, independent players are selected based on their performance in local events. But some talented players fall through the cracks.

"Some of those with a good deal of talent, but who are not able to compete in tournaments, go unnoticed and end up playing in the pool halls just for fun," El-Dalati said.

But despite the sport's popularity among the youth, one reason why it has not found more secure footing is a mounting paranoia surrounding the new pool halls and the influence they have on those who frequent them.

Gamal admits that while the majority of pool and billiards players view it as a recreational activity and do not put too much emphasis on the outcome of the game, others are more zealous. Some players place bets throughout the game.

In addition, he said, "parents complain that afternoons spent in the pool halls divert the attention of the youths from their school work and other responsibilities."

"Moreover, not everyone who plays can afford the LE15 per hour that many of the pool halls charge," he stated, adding, "so in order to raise the money, some kids raise the money through whatever channels they can, including stealing."

But Rivoli club's Besam Emad argues that this is oversimplifying the issue. "Even if such acts do occur, they are not unique to billiards. They occur in any competitive sport," he stressed.

Die-hard pool aficionados, however, are not swayed by these criticisms. The pool halls continue to increase in number and so do those who frequent them.

The question that remains to be answered, however, is whether this new fad will be tackled in a way that is beneficial or detrimental to those who embrace it. For Besam Emad and Emad Nasif, this translates into whether they will sink the eight ball for money, or for fun.

South Africa's Wayne Ferrira looks at his trophy after he beat top-seeded Pete Sampras of the United States 7-6, 5-7, 6-3 in the final of the $ 565,000 indoor tennis tournament in Lyons, central France. *(photo: AP)*

Buffed bodies

BODYBUILDERS from ten different countries will flex and pose in the indoor hall of the Ahli Club for tomorrow's First African Body building Championship.

Ali Abdel-Khalik, the Egyptian team's technical manager, predicts that Egypt will face stiff competition from South Africa which won the gold in 1994's World Championship. Algeria, which won the silver medal in the last Mediterranean Championship held in 1993, could also give Egypt a run for its money.

El-Shahat Mabrouk, an Egyptian body building champion, will slop on the body oil and pose in a special exhibition show.

Go, speed racer!

A FEW YEARS ago it was tanks that crossed into Tienanmin Square, but last week's arrivals in the square were met under more pleasant circumstances. Sweden's Kenneth Eriksson and Steffan Parmander, burning rubber in a Mitsubishi Lancer Ralliart, were the first to cross the finish line of the 3,669 kilometre 555 Hong Kong-Beijing Auto Rally which ended at this historic site. They were followed closely by Finland's former World Champion, Ari Vatanen, who teamed up with Italy's Fabrizio Pons. A pair of Brits, Richard Burns and Robert Reid, took third.

Ace of base

THE WORLD'S fifth ranked Michael Chang, hammered 40th ranked Renzo Furlan of Italy 7-5 6-3 to capture his third straight Salem Open Tennis Tournament title last week. Chang relied on his blazing serves and deep, baseline returns to help him pocket the $43,000 in prize money.

Sweden's Stefan Edberg also had a good week. In three straight sets, 6-3, 6-1 and 7-6, Edberg aced his way past Italy's Andrea Gaudenzi to win, for the second consecutive year, the Marlboro Tennis Championship, and add several thousand dollars more to his stuffed bank account. Not bad for a few hours of work.

Blatter, "OK"

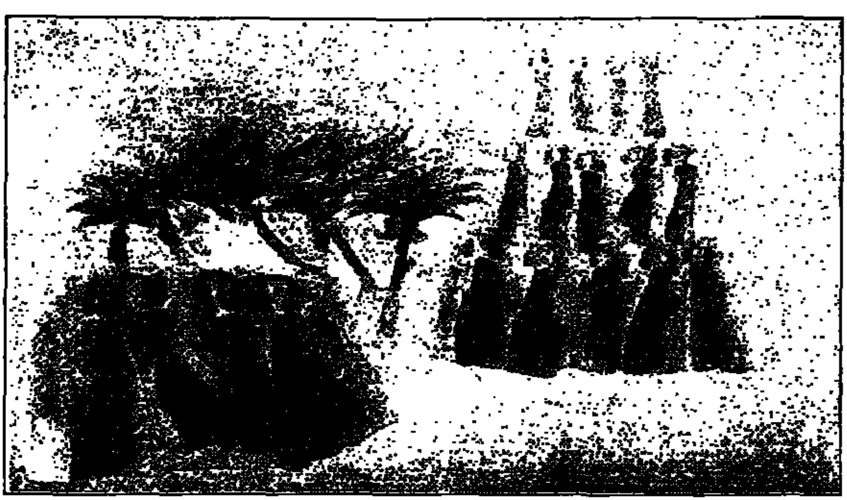
AFRICA'S soccer players, said FIFA Secretary-General Joseph Blatter in a Sunday press conference at the headquarters of the Egyptian Football Federation, are leaving their mark on the international soccer field.

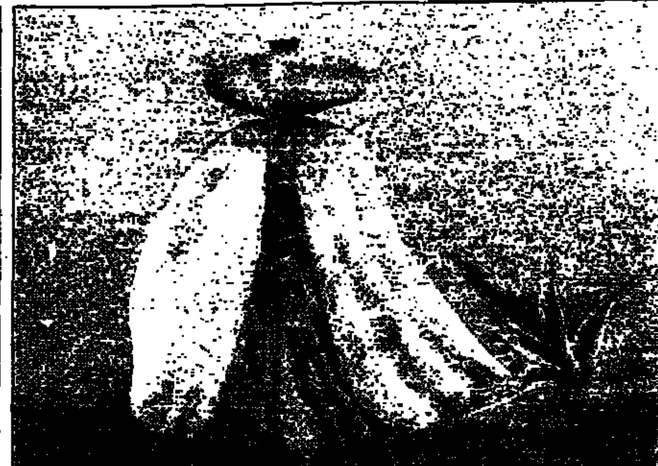
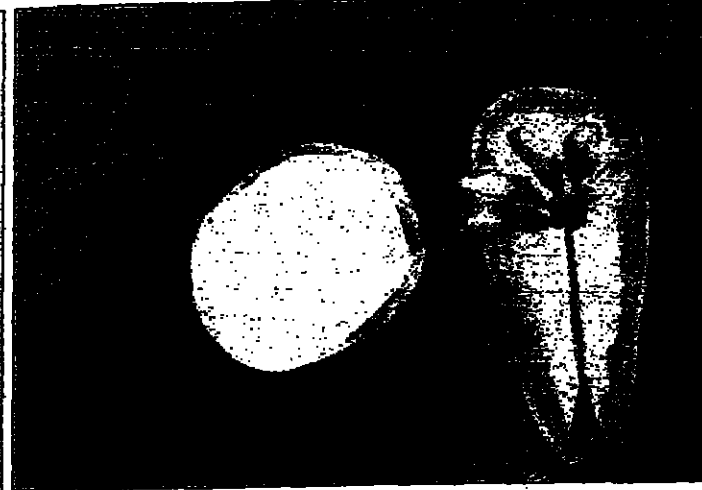
For example, Blatter said, in the 1998 World Cup in France, there are five slots reserved for African nations instead of the three reserved during the last World Cup. In addition, at least one African player is playing for every European club.

He added that FIFA is now considering holding the 2006 World Cup in an African nation. The 2002 World Cup will be held either in Japan or Korea.

Blatter, who was on a four-day visit to Egypt to inspect their preparations for the 1997 Junior's World Cup in Cairo, complemented Egyptian soccer officials for their efforts. The competition, he predicted, should be successful.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**



Watercolours by Adly Rizkallah:(l-r) Sa'idi women (1991), The Mother (1988), Bedouin woman (1988), Watercolour sculpture (1994)

Adly Rizkallah: The colours of poetry

For ten years he searched in vain. He almost gave up. One night playing idly with his watercolours he was suddenly confronted with his creation. A composition new to the world, unique, the ultimate goal of his life. 25 years later, he celebrates this momentous instant with an exhibition of 200 watercolours



photo: Sherif Sonbol

As he opens the door, I find myself on familiar territory: the furniture is Mohamed Muhib, the style "Modern Islamic". The simple lines of the armchairs are discreetly functional. The family is not concerned with interior decoration, the room is about art: a place for his paintings, the elegantly simple extension of a studio. And there is Adly Rizkallah, the artist in the role of the artist, with the glasses, the little beard, the hesitant demeanour, slightly bewildered as if just awakened from a pleasant dream. Yet he is the epitome of the gracious host: he introduces a friend, apologises for the temporary absence of his wife, fusses to offer me a place on the sofa, coffee... well, would tea do? They are all out of coffee. The atmosphere is friendly and warm. *The friend goes to make the tea*; she is an old friend, almost one of the family, and knows her way around. Adly abandons her to her devices, very much the Egyptian master of the house, used to leaving the kitchen to the women. Strangely, however, he strikes me as someone who can cook. Should I ask, or is his air of the nonchalant French man of the world deceptive?

He has lived and become well known in Paris. He loved it for a while, then ran away. "I felt it could swallow me, the commercialism of being a 'peintre côté' in Paris." His exhibition attracted a good public, he sold well. He could have made it his home. But he yearned for Egyptian backgrounds, and abandoning his budding fame, came back to start from scratch. "We came to live in this *small apartment and* my wife took a job."

I step out onto the small balcony, crowded with healthy potted plants.

The street below is 'busy provincial', a typical street on which middle class families have lived for a long time. A few donkey-drawn carts roll by, loaded with vegetables. The cry of vendors is distinctly audible. Children are pouring out of the school's derelict buildings, which are hidden by clumps of trees and in dire need of attention. To the right, in stark contrast, one has a full view of the large, neat square with the Tahra Palace at the far end. On this side, the trees are in no need of attention: they are lavished with water and carefully attended by gardeners armed with pruning shears. Rizkallah lives here, at a crossroads between the boisterously populous and the quietly elegant, a *befitting symbol for the artist* whose most profound roots spring from the Sa'id and whose paintings are far from the "ethnic-folklore" school so dear to many Egyptian painters. His understated elegance of expression, his discretion when referring to hard times, his infatuation with precision, punctuality and intellectual discipline are those of the Parisian gentleman; but his emotions, his affection, are reserved for Egypt.

His father was a weaver and a fellah who owned a small plot of less than three feddans. He loved both the craft, at which he excelled, says Rizkallah, and the land which gave him enough to feed his family. He lived happily immersed in Assiouti traditions.

After the Second World War, sometime in the forties, the family moved to Cairo. The father, *cut off from his cultural roots, from* his beloved Sa'id, never took to the city. Dragged away from the earth, from *village life, he failed to* flourish.

Rizkallah's memories of his early childhood in Cairo are those of a lonely little boy prone to daydreaming and of his passion for music. "But I knew that my family could never afford to buy me a musical instrument or pay for a music teacher." So he never asked. But soon he was to discover a treasure trove: his brother worked for a textile shop. "It was called a *manifatura* then," recalls Rizkallah. "I used to mind the shop for my brother. It was filled with huge piles of cardboard used to pack the merchandise in. Armed with a pencil, secure in the *thought that he would not want* for "art supplies", he set to work.

At the age of thirteen he made the *decision of his life: He was* going to be a painter. He went to the Faculty of Fine Arts and stood outside, dreaming, imagining what went on inside. It awed him. He saw colours with his mind's eyes, all the enchanting colours used by the chosen — the artists. He did not think of them as ordinary students and teachers but as "artists", teachers and students united in the creation of what he thought of as art, all of them breathing a special air and experiencing visions forbidden to ordinary creatures. He promised himself that one day he would be one of them.

As Rizkallah's gentle voice went on, I found myself totally ab*sorbed by the paintings hanging on* the walls. The translucent white of the soft rounded shapes had an irresistible, almost hypnotic sensual appeal, redolent of comfort, well-being and tender care.

Art discourse has its own jargon which I know nothing about, so my mind wondered, playing with clouds, doves, eggs, flowers and butterflies and full female shapes, plump pregnant oysters, births and the warmth of a fertile womb, woman's essence captured and then allowed to bloom.

The possibilities are endless, the delicate colours caressing the eye of the *beholder*, their beauty insidious, fluid. Flatness, sharpness are totally absent from every composition. None are provocative, the message is one of non-violence, of love and the acceptance of one's vulnerable humanity. If paintings have a sex, Rizkallah's would be female, humming a hymn to life, to the mysteries of gestation and birth, death not an end but a return to the womb, to safety and protection, in preparation for a glorious rebirth.

Art is intimidating to the non-initiated. The discourse has become specialised and monopolised by critics with or without *pince-nez*. Questions are *superfluous*, often embarrassing. All that is left is to listen to the artist.

Colours were always present in Rizkallah's life, the Pandora's box in which he was going to find something undefined yet ineffably present. His first box of colouring pencils was given to him by *Ustaz* Ramzi, a client of the shop, who once, after examining the drawings young Adly used to pin on the walls, came back in the evening to present him with his gift.

At school, *Ustaz* Edward, whom he admired unreservedly *because of his fashionable glasses* and because he played the violin and "could make it say *Allahu Akbar*", asked the students one day to draw a scene representing a funeral. "I remember my drawing," says Rizkallah, the women crying and beating their faces and breasts. "It pleased *Ustaz* Edward so much that he bought me a big box of watercolours as a reward. I was happy to have been singled out and even happier with the present. At once I proceeded to use the new colours on my drawing. Suddenly I received a tremendous slap on the face from *Ustaz* Edward. I burst out crying. The surprise - and the pain - were staggering. "You little fool," Ustaz Edward was saying, "you have spoiled your beautiful drawing." I sat silently, still upset about the slap but happy that he had liked my drawing so much that *its modification* provoked a violent reaction. He pushed me aside, sat in my place and gave me my first lesson in the use of watercolours." Much later, when *Rizkallah* started to paint, watercolours became his medium.

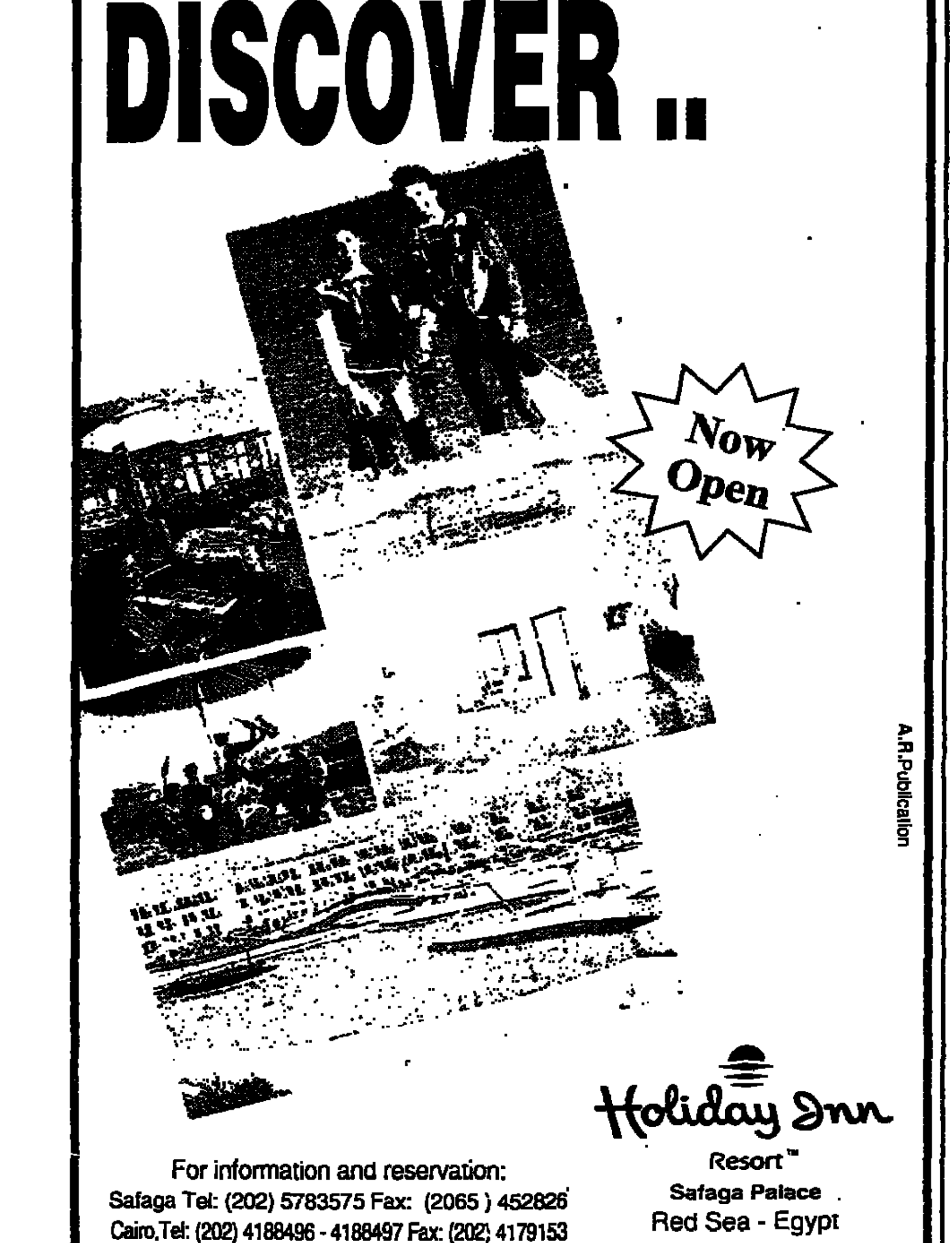
Of his time at the Faculty of Fine Arts, where he enrolled himself without his parents' knowledge at first, only telling them when he received a scholarship, of *his beginnings as an artist here and* then in Paris, Rizkallah speaks with reserve. There are no tales of the starving artist struggling to keep going. "I illustrated children's books, I could always make a living," he says briefly, lightly hinting at his successful career in this field.

His wife was with him in Paris and Tamr, their first daughter, was born there. At the mention of his wife, Rizkallah's expression changes. There is immense tenderness here, and respect and gratitude. She is his muse and his helper and his partner; theirs is more than a marriage, it is a symbiotic relationship. "I tell her everything, she knows everything about me and I know everything about her. He is the artist, though, and she takes care of the practicalities. With the children, their roles are *interchangeable although* he thinks that the girls are maybe closer to her.

When their first child was born, he says with great emotion, he was at Soheir's side, crying *her* tears of pain and then of joy at the birth. When he created the painting he considers to have been his first *work of art, she shared every minute*. He describes the moment with an intense frown; he was playing with his watercolours aimlessly then looking at the page, he became suddenly intent: There it was. A revelation. He called her, beside himself, and they cried and laughed together. But this was not the end of the road, just the beginning and today he is still searching for other miracles. "When I find it [the ultimate miracle — the final truth] I will disappear," he says cryptically. "I told Soheir, she knows." He has written:

"Whenever I look back I find that I have accomplished very little
The *shore* looms in *front* of the eye, as if I had never left it
The sea never ends
I desire the deep, my heart does not relent and the longing is never quenched.
Then
I see wild beauty. I see it with my heart ... and my body I confide in her:
"I can see what the human heart cannot
withhold if I pace a step I will never come back."

Profile by Fayza Hassan





Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♠ Dears, I have just come back from Johannesburg and I must say, the glorious landscapes of South Africa haunt me still: The **Reda Folkloric Dance Troupe**, my personal favourite ever since I was just a teeny-weeny thing, recently won first prize and a gold medal at a cultural and arts festival held there along with the Arab-African Trade Fair from 6 to 14 October. What with all those businessmen in dark suits, the colourful costumes of the agile Reda dancers were a joy to see. And what I enjoyed even more than mingling with old friends and clapping to the vivacious tunes, was the Egyptian evening organised by members of the Greek folkloric troupe, who are originally from Egypt. I always say the Mediterranean lives and breathes in every one of us. And wasn't Minister of Culture **Farouk Hosni** happy about the laurels Egypt reaped? He at once told Undersecretary for International Cultural Relations **Mohamed Ghoneim** to organise *a prize-awarding ceremony for* all the Egyptian dance and theatre troupes who have won awards in the past two years.

♥ *If you are as interested in thespian affairs as I am*, you will be pleased to hear that **Sami Khashaba**, deputy Editor-in-Chief of *Al-Ahram* and well-known writer and literary critic in his own right, has been chosen by a decree, issued by none other than **Farouk Hosni** again, to head the theatre sector at the Ministry of Culture. If you read the Friday culture page of *Al-Ahram*, Sami needs no further panegyric from *me*. If you don't, you can make up for it by reading his book on theatre. Sami's publications are closely read by acting students and professionals alike. In fact, his family is a veritable artistic institution: his wife, **Khairiya El-Bishlawi**, is a cinema critic.



(l-r) AUC PR director Nagwa Shoeb, Hafez, Safeyyah and Kerek

♦ Last Sunday my visual and aural senses were filled up with the most marvellous combination of music and art. Music by internationally acclaimed pianist **Suraya Meyine** wafted gently across AUC's Ewart Gallery, complementing the wonderful exhibit of landscape paintings by artist, environmentalist and occasional contributor to the *Weekly* **Safeyyah Moyine**. The exhibition had been officially opened that same evening by chief executive officer of the Environmental Affairs Agency **Salah Hafez**, and AUC's provost senior vice president **Andrew Kerek**. But Safeyyah's love for nature doesn't just stop at her paintings. In an effort to fight pollution and preserve natural beauty, she has also actively contributed by establishing, with her husband and other environmentalists, the Tree Lover's Association. All this talk of beauty and nature just makes me long for the plains of South Africa once more. Oh! to be where the gazelle graze and the buffalo roam.

